Guitar MAGAZINE

03
9 772515 268046
MARCH 2020
ISSUE 378
£5.99

THE BEST NEW GUITARS, AMPS AND FX FROM NAMM 2020

REVIEWED
FENDER
SUPRO
D'ANGELICO
HUGHES &
KETTNER
AND MORE!

What Gibson Did Next

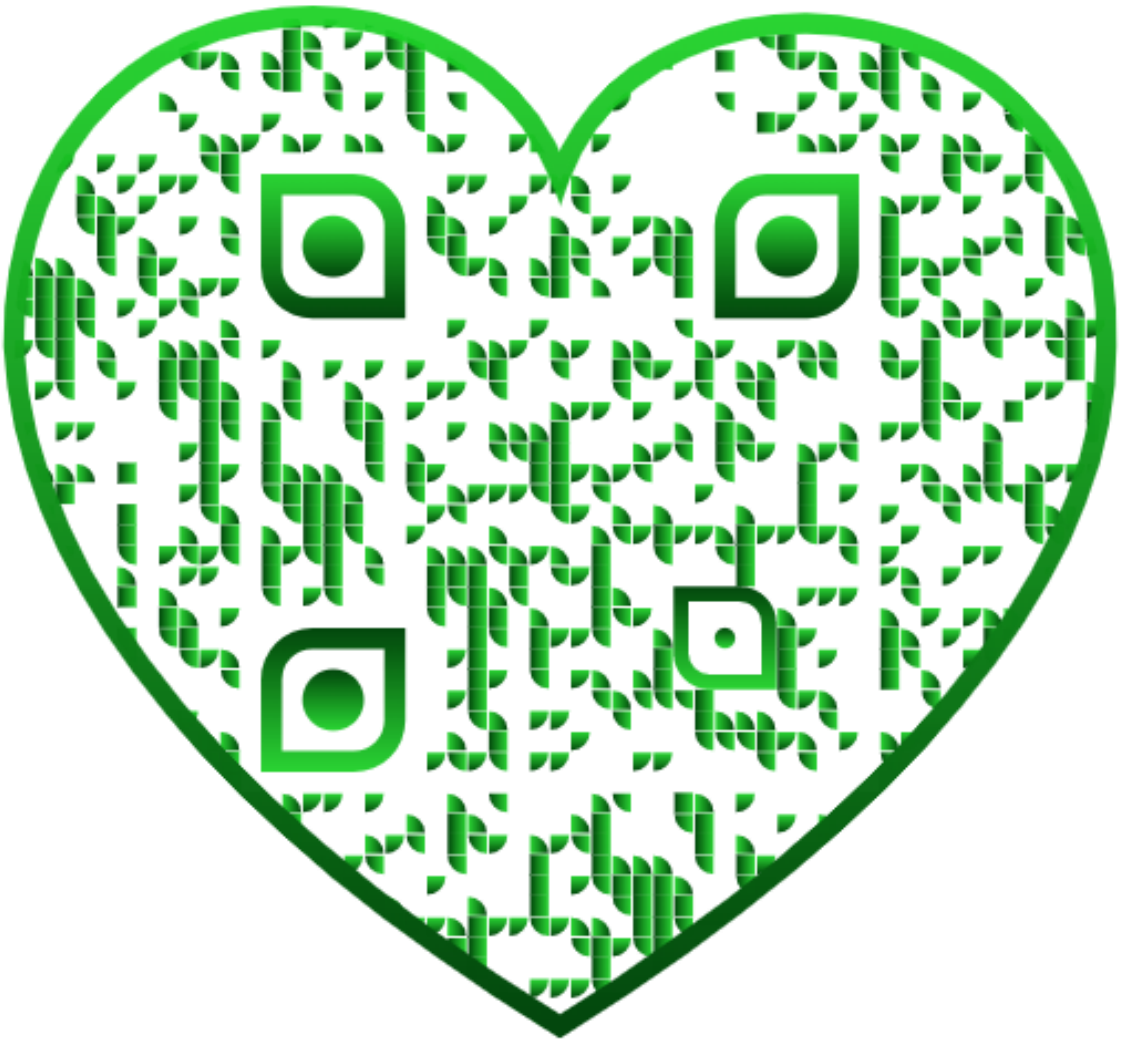
SLASH SIGNATURE MODELS, NEW EPIPHONES AND MORE...
HAS THE GUITAR GIANT GOT ITS MOJO BACK?

+

ACOUSTIC INNOVATION AND URBAN SUSTAINABILITY FROM TAYLOR

ANDY SUMMERS AND AL DI MEOLA IN CONVERSATION

DIY
HANG YOUR GUITARS THE RIGHT WAY



MADE IN BY Sheeran IRELAND

THEY'VE ARRIVED

Sheeran BY Lowden

"This is what I record with, this is what I play with, this is what I have at home to just chill out and strum to, and I think once you know you're serious about playing guitar this is the best instrument that you could get."

Ed Sheeran

SheeranGuitars.com

Sheeran
HOU

CONTENTS

34

108

20

104

50

110

124

ISSUE 378

CONTENTS

009 EDITOR'S LETTER
010 FRETBUZZ
012 SUBSCRIBE
014 ONES TO WATCH: NOVATINES
016 ALBUM SPOTLIGHT: DEAD SHED JOKERS
017 THE PLAYLIST
018 WIN! TEISCO BOOST & FUZZ PEDALS
020 REVIEW: GIBSON SLASH LES PAUL & J-45
032 INTERVIEW: SLASH
034 FEATURE: WHAT GIBSON DID NEXT
044 THE GUITAR INTERVIEW: ANDY SUMMERS
050 INTERVIEW: AL DI MEOLA
056 WINTER NAMM 2020: BEST IN SHOW
068 VINTAGE BENCH TEST: 1958 & '59 GIBSON LES PAUL SPECIALS
078 AMPLIFIER FAQ
080 INDUSTRY INSIDER: GFI SYSTEM
082 SHOP TALK: JOE KNAGGS
088 FEATURE: ANDY POWERS ON TAYLOR'S NEW BUILDER'S EDITION COLLECTION
96 REVIEW: TAYLOR BUILDER'S EDITION 816CE & 324CE
104 REVIEW: FENDER AMERICAN ULTRA JAZZMASTER
108 REVIEW: D'ANGELICO EXCEL SS
110 REVIEW: SUPRO BLUES KING 8
114 REVIEW: HUGHES & KETTNER BLACK SPIRIT 200 FLOOR
118 REVIEW: FENDER REFLECTING POOL, MTG:LA, TRAPPER, COMPUGILIST, SMOLDER & POUR OVER PEDALS
124 REVIEW: MISTWEAVER EFFECTS FORESTRY & THE SERPENT
128 DIY: HANG YOUR GUITARS THE RIGHT WAY
134 DIY: HARDTAIL HEARTACHE
138 ESSENTIAL BLUES PART 14: THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE, SHAPES 4 & 5
142 CHORD CLINIC: THE EAGLES
146 TALKBOX: ROSS LYNCH

ABOVE. BEYOND. ULTRA.

Fender

NEVER PLAY A STRAT® THE SAME WAY AGAIN.

The American Ultra Stratocaster® HSS in Cobra Blue features an Ultra Double Tap™ humbucking pickup for a fat double-coil tone or a clear, powerful single-coil sound.
American Ultra Series: All-New Body Contours. Ultra Noiseless™ Pickups. Our Fastest-Playing Necks.

©2019 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. FENDER, FENDER in script, STRAT, STRATOCASTER and the distinctive headstock commonly found on Fender guitars and basses are trademarks of FMIC. Registered in the U.S. and foreign countries. DOUBLE TAP is a U.S. registered trademark. All rights reserved.

VOLUME
TONE
TONE

Lowden
GUITARS

The Wee Lowden
12 Fret

New for 2020

Guitar MAGAZINE

BandLab UK Limited
Unit 7, Riverside Court,
Lower Bristol Road,
Bath BA2 3DZ

EDITORIAL

CHIEF EDITOR Chris Vinnicombe
MANAGING EDITOR Josh Gardner
ART EDITOR Philip Millard
PRODUCTION EDITOR Michael Leonard
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Sam Roberts
SENIOR PRODUCT SPECIALIST Huw Price
INSTRUMENT & COVER PHOTOGRAPHY Eleanor Jane
CONTRIBUTORS Michael James Adams, Rod Fogg, Leigh Fuge, Dave Hunter, Huw Price, Richard Purvis, Michael Watts
HAVE A STORY? Email us at editors@guitar.com

SALES

ADVERTISING MANAGER Joe Supple
joe.supple@guitar.com
BUSINESS DEVELOPMENT MANAGER Di Marsh
di.marsh@guitar.com

PRODUCTION & OPERATIONS

PUBLISHING PRODUCTION MANAGER Craig Broadbridge
PRINT William Gibbons & Sons Ltd
DISTRIBUTED BY Marketforce (UK) Ltd
5 Churchill Place, Canary Wharf, London E14 5HU

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER Meng Ru Kuok
CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER Ivan Chen
UK COUNTRY DIRECTOR & HEAD OF STRATEGY & PARTNERSHIPS (EMEA) Holly Bishop
AVP, WEB TECHNOLOGIES Laurent Le Graverend
AVP, COMMS & PARTNERSHIPS Lauren Hendry Parsons
SENIOR MANAGER, GROUP & BRAND STRATEGY Krystle Hall
MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY Iliyas Ong
ASSOCIATE MANAGER, CONTENT STRATEGY Terence Stanley
ASSOCIATE EDITOR Evigan Xiao
STAFF WRITER Cillian Breathnach

SUBSCRIPTIONS & BACK ISSUES

guitar.com/subscribe
Tel +44 (0) 1371 851 882
Calls cost 7p per minute plus your phone company's access charge

BANDLAB TECHNOLOGIES

All content copyright BandLab UK Limited 2020, all rights reserved. While we make every effort to ensure that the factual content of *Guitar Magazine* is correct, we cannot take any responsibility nor be held accountable for any factual errors printed. Please make every effort to check quoted prices and product specifications with manufacturers prior to purchase. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or resold without the prior consent of BandLab UK Limited. *Guitar Magazine* recognises all copyrights contained within this issue. Where possible, we acknowledge the copyright.

EDITOR'S LETTER

THE SHOW'S OVER, FOLKS

As another NAMM Show disappears in the rearview, those of us who were there (man) can vouch for fact that the Anaheim air was crackling with an overriding sense of positivity. As you'll find throughout this issue, the guitar highlights were abundant, not least in the shape of Gibson's huge presence at the show, with everything from the redesigned Epiphone headstock to Slash and Don Felder's performance of *Hotel California* getting heads nodding and tongues wagging.

Read our interview with the GN'R legend and find out what we think of his new signature Les Paul and J-45 in our huge cover feature from p20 onwards, in which Gibson CMO Cesar Gueikian also discusses *that* 'Play Authentic' video and how the past 12 months have seen the company rebuild, recover and get its mojo back. Even most of the brand's competitors seem to agree that a strong Gibson is good for the industry, and on the evidence provided by the guitars on the show floor, it's good for guitar fans, too.

It wasn't all about Gibson, though, and neither is this month's mag – head to p86 as we visit Taylor's Master Guitar Designer Andy Powers at his home workshop just up the coast from San Diego to gain insights into a range of new instruments that combine innovation with a thoughtful approach to sustainability.

Elsewhere, you'll find the familiar blend of reviews, lessons, DIY and vintage and we also speak to two bona fide legends in the shape of Police star Andy Summers and virtuoso fusioneer Al Di Meola. Don't forget to head to *Guitar.com* for even more guitar goodness and more than 80 great videos from NAMM. Like and subscribe if you enjoy what you see and if you comment... be nice!
See you next month.

Chris Vinnicombe
Chief Editor, Guitar.com & Guitar Magazine
chris@guitar.com

DON'T MISS OUT!

Visit us online for the latest on gear, artists, technique and the guitar industry
Guitar.com | facebook.com/guitar | youtube.com/theguitarmagazine
instagram.com/guitar | twitter.com/guitar

FRETBUZZ

Your letters and observations on the world of guitar

Join the conversation Email us at editors@guitar.com

Colin Saunders built his own guitar at 77

NEVER TOO LATE

Dear sir, as a regular subscriber, firstly may I say how very much I enjoy your magazine. My interest in the guitar has been rekindled in the last year or so, mainly due to looking through old photographs that reminded me of being part of a group in my teens, and owning several guitars – some I wish I still had now!

This renewed interest led me to decide to make my own acoustic guitar, so that I could hopefully play an instrument that I'd made myself. I first bought a book on how to do the job properly (*Build Your Own Acoustic Guitar* by Jonathan Kinkead), then purchased the materials and got on with the job. It took me several months doing it in my spare time, but I got there in the end and achieved the desired result, of which I'm duly proud! I've since bought myself an electro-acoustic and am relearning to play all over again.

Having built the guitar, it gives me much more appreciation of the variety, quality and craftsmanship in the range of instruments that are available today, and it makes me truly love visiting my local guitar shops. Apologies for dragging on, but I felt it would be worthwhile explaining my journey to rediscovering the guitar, as I'm 77 years old!

COLIN SAUNDERS, ROWLEY REGIS, UK

Thanks for your letter, Colin – no apologies necessary! Your story of rediscovering your love of guitars in your late 70s (and even building your own) should be an inspiration for anyone who feels a little disenchanted with this wonderful instrument. It's never too late to develop or rekindle a passion for the guitar, and we wish you many happy hours of playing, building and browsing!

KAEMPFERT IN SOUND

Dear *Guitar Magazine*, you asked in your February editorial if there was a product that doesn't yet exist that I would like to see. I've thought for a long time that it would be good to have a pedal for bass players that produces the Bert Kaempfert sound, the 'click bass' sound that was widely popular in recordings of the 1970s. I'm not aware of any gadget available to do this, though some settings on a Fender Jazz Bass played with a suitable pick can come reasonably close.

I believe the sound was a studio-based effect produced by closely overdubbing a double bass with a muted and slightly reverb-enhanced guitar. It's such a great sound, and in these days of clever electronics I expect someone could come up with a good simulation.

MIKE BARNHAM, VIA EMAIL

Thanks Mike, it is a very cool sound indeed! Do any builders want to take up the challenge?

BREEDING GROUND

I enjoyed the New Breed article, but I have a question. How do you list Molly Tuttle, but not Billy Strings? Billy is amazing and probably better than half of those listed!

JAKE HARTMAN, VIA EMAIL

Your New Breed article forgot one guitarist. Drew Smithers is an amazing guitarist, and I have heard many people including myself say that they are surprised that you all did not include him in the list!

LACHLAN THORNTON, VIA EMAIL

THE NEW

SLASH COLLECTION

SLASH J-45 STANDARD
NOVEMBER BURST

Gibson

Guitar MAGAZINE

SUBSCRIBE AND SAVE UP TO 35%*

SAVE 35% ON THE SHOP PRICE – JUST £3.83 PER ISSUE!*

GET YOUR MONTHLY SUPPLY
OF NEW GEAR REVIEWS, IN-DEPTH FEATURES,
WORKSHOPS AND TUITION

SPREAD THE COST
BY CONVENIENT DIRECT DEBIT*

FREE UK DELIVERY

NOT IN THE UK?

DON'T WORRY – WE'VE GOT SPECIAL OFFERS FOR INTERNATIONAL READERS, TOO!

EUROPE €39.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVING 35%
USA/CANADA $42.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVING 35%
AUSTRALIA $58.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVING 35%
REST OF WORLD £35.99 EVERY 6 MONTHS – SAVING 35%

ORDER ONLINE TODAY AT GUITAR.COM/SUBSCRIBE

ORDER NOW!

ONLINE
GUITAR.COM/SUBSCRIBE
USE CODE **GM2020**

PHONE
01371 851 882
USE CODE **GM2020**

CODE **GM2020**

OFFER ENDS **31 DECEMBER 2020**

*35% saving is available to UK customers paying by Direct Debit only. You will pay just £22.99 every 6 months, saving 35% off the UK cover price. All other savings are based on the local cover price for Europe, Australia and North America and are available when you pay by continuous card payment only. You will receive 12 issues of *Guitar Magazine* per year, starting with the next available issue.

Guitar MAGAZINE

MARCH 2020
ISSUE 378
£5.99

THE BEST NEW GUITARS, AMPS AND FX FROM **NAMM 2020**

REVIEWED
FENDER
SUPRO
D'ANGELICO
HUGHES & KETTNER
AND MORE!

What Gibson Did Next

SLASH SIGNATURE MODELS, NEW EPIPHONES AND MORE... HAS THE GUITAR GIANT GOT ITS MOJO BACK?

+

ACOUSTIC INNOVATION AND URBAN SUSTAINABILITY FROM TAYLOR

ANDY SUMMERS AND AL DI MEOLA IN CONVERSATION

DIY
HANG YOUR GUITARS THE RIGHT WAY

ONES TO WATCH

NOVATINES

WORDS SAM ROBERTS

These West Country rock revivalists are gathering a reputation across UK stages and radio stations for big tunes and big riffs …

Having only formed in 2017, Novatines quickly established themselves as one of the best new bands on the UK's rock scene. Following numerous line-up changes under different monikers, the band rapidly found an audience following their formation as Novatines, quickly racing through the UK festival scene via support slots with the likes of Arcane Roots and Alabama 3.

Their escapades with renowned artists didn't stop there, with a recording session at Peter Gabriel's esteemed Real World Studios – with The Sweet's Andy Scott at the helm – quickly following. That resulted in *Hate Love*, the first of four singles, being played on Planet Rock radio, before getting further coverage across BBC Radio 2 and Radio 6 Music. Firmly placing themselves in the camp of British rock revivalists, and with lofty ambitions following their European tour with the aforementioned Sweet, they still remain grounded and dedicated to their craft. Here guitarist Tom Cory tells us how it all began…

What first drew you to playing guitar?

"I grew up on bands such as Pink Floyd, Led Zeppelin and The Who – I basically inherited my Dad's musical taste. When I was eight I remember deciding that I wanted to be like all these guitar legends so I acquired one of those £15 Argos classical guitars, the first song I learned was Pink Floyd's *Wish You Were Here*. After a few months it was pretty clear that guitar was not just going to be a brief phase.

"My first electric guitar was a red Strat copy – I was going for that David Gilmour

In the spotlight: Novatines' rhythm guitarist/vocalist Jamie Beale (above centre), bassist Tom Turner (above) and lead player Tom Cory (inset)

Pulse look – and from that point I never put it down. I'd sit in the house playing along to Floyd, Led Zeppelin and The Who concerts. I like to think you can hear influences from Gilmour, Page and Townshend in my playing."

How did the band come together?
"We've all known each other for a while, growing up in the same music scene and playing with each other in various different musical embodiments.

"Eventually we all banged our heads together and Novatines was the result. That and no one else wanted to spend an obscene amount of hours in a van with us, driving up and down the country and detouring our way through every middle-of-nowhere."

"THERE IS A BIG DIFFERENCE BETWEEN PLAYING TO 60 PEOPLE AND TO 6,000. GOING FROM PLAYING SMALL CLUBS TO TOURING INTERNATIONALLY WITH THE LIKES OF SWEET HAS REALLY FORCED US TO STEP UP OUR GAME"

Tell us about your main influences as a band...
"We'd have to say Led Zeppelin, The Beatles, Nirvana, Foo Fighters and Pearl Jam."

There's an anthemic element to your songs that some bands only achieve after years: how did you develop this sound so early?
"No secret formula or life changing 'eureka' moment, but just the way we do it. If it ain't catchy how are we supposed to remember it? As a band we have a pretty solid 'shit filter' so if a song doesn't make the mark then we're all happy to say 'Nah'."

Your recent single, *Come Alive*, has received strong acclaim from the likes of *Classic Rock* magazine and BBC Radio 2. Which of your songs do you believe embodies Novatines most?
"*Come Alive* is definitely one of the tracks that really cemented our sound early on and set a benchmark for us.

"*Medicine* is also one of those songs that as soon as we finished we knew that there was something else there – that track is actually the one that got the ball rolling with Andy Scott. To be honest, we've all got a bunch of different sides to us as humans, so we like to reflect that in the music."

You've recently toured with some big established acts, what impact has that had on you as a collective?
"There is a big difference between playing to 60 people and to 6,000 people in a room. Going from playing small clubs to touring internationally with the likes of Sweet has really forced us to step up our game. Maintaining the same energy for 17 nights on the bounce really makes you rethink how you approach the show. We quickly realised that it can't always be lager and mad ones, sometimes it's more green tea, vocal warmups and early nights. All of our favourite bands have longevity, which is ultimately what we want."

What are your guitars and amps of choice?
"On our studio recordings you're hearing mainly two of my favourite guitars. Firstly, my 1990s USA Telecaster – stock pickups, but I love it, it's a nice balance of that Tele twang but still big and weighty. Secondly, and particularly for the more driven sounds, my 80s Korean Epiphone Sheraton.

"All of this goes into a Marshall JCM2000 head, and either a Marshall 1960A 4x12, or a Marshall 2x12 cab. I also ran through a little 30-watt Sound City combo into a WEM bass cab. Pedal-wise, I use an array of stacked drives, a little bit of compression and some rotary and delay action too... voilà!

"I've recently dug out my trusty black Gibson Les Paul Studio too – it's got one of those chambered bodies so it's super-light and easy to throw about. Although this does also mean it's getting naturally road worn very quickly."

What's next for Novatines?
"We're back on the road in February to coincide with the release of our debut EP *Wasted Youth*. Come along, everyone's invited!"

Novatines debut EP, *Wasted Youth*, is released in February 2020

THE PLAYLIST

© Konstantina Frasia Photography

ALBUM SPOTLIGHT

DEAD SHED JOKERS
ALL THE SEASONS

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

A shining example of the guitar revival in South Wales, Dead Shed Jokers' new LP moves from balladry to stoner rock with aplomb

Recorded live over the course of just five days, Dead Shed Jokers' third full-length album is a more considered and nuanced record than 2015's self-titled long-player. Titled *All The Seasons*, the album is a fully-formed monster with intricacy and breadth to the guitar work, due in part to the band's settled line up – DSJ underwent a personnel change after their second album. Three guitar players in the studio make sure each sonic pathway is now covered, with Stratocasters, a 1982 Gibson Sonex and an Epiphone ES-335 Pro adding textures throughout the album.

Despite the airtight performances and consistency, there's plenty of bait and switch on the album, moving from QOTSA-indebted riffery to 90s balladry reminiscent of Temple Of The Dog with consummate ease.

It's no wonder Dead Shed Jokers have become favourites of indie radio stations over the past year. Here, frontman Hywel Davies sheds some light on his favourite guitar parts on *All The Seasons*...

PHANTOM PAINS

"This song took about two years to finish, easily the longest in the band's history, and it came from jamming in the shed. I stumbled across a 2018 recording of it recently and I couldn't believe how shit it was compared to the finished article. We ditched it for a year or so, and then went back to it and cut it up.

"The original chorus riff is only in one section now (around 4:45), as a bridge which leads to the outro drop D riff which is probably one of my favourites on the album. We used it to go from minor to major keys, then the drumming mixes up the feel of the last riff until the half time section at the end. There's some cool fat, fuzzed-up tremolo on the intro and outro.

"Sometimes you've got to be brutal to get to the best version of a song. We couldn't have started the album with anything else."

DREAM OF NORTH KOREA

"The main riff is in an open E tuning, G down to E, and the time signature varies from 4/4 to 4/6. It's a hefty groovy riff as it is, but when Metz [DSJ guitarist Christopher Metters] comes in with that screaming lead, it really fires a rocket up its arse. When the main riff reappears over the descending chord sequence at the end it gives the song an *LA Woman* vibe, as it goes up a few gears and races to the finish."

FEEL TODAY

"Metz came in with the lead line for this. It's a sexy melody in the vein of QOTSA, and sounds great through the Fender Hot Rod Deluxe. As well as the intro and outro – with a Big Muff and two other fuzz pedals on – we cut it up as a call and response in the second verse with the vocal. There's a good smattering of heavier angular riffs throughout the song too, including some with a Latin vibe towards the end."

YOU'RE A THIEF

"This one's in drop D – our general tuning of choice – and has a lot going on, guitar-wise. It's over six minutes long and we wanted it to be an atmospheric journey with a satisfying crescendo, considering the personal lyrical content. It's a light/shade number with heavy Sabbath-esque chorus riffs paired with spooky, intricate verse parts dripping in delay. This was tricky to record live and took a few takes, but I think we did it justice."

ENOUGH IS AS GOOD AS A FEAST

"This represents everything I love about music; how it can just fall out of the sky and magically come to life. I wrote the lyrics in about 10 minutes in one creative mind-fart. The following day Nick [Bryant, guitars] came round and we finished that night – or morning, probably – with an acoustic on the couch before crashing.

"The last half of the song was a jam in the studio and really captures the live vibe of the band. Nick then topped it off with a one-take improvised solo overdub with his Gibson Sonex, which really takes the end section into the stratosphere.

"Every album he pulls something amazing out of his hat in the studio and reminds us why we he hasn't been sacked!"

Dead Shed Jokers' *All The Seasons* is out now on Pity My Brain

This month's essential tracks for guitar lovers…

INHALER
We Have To Move On

Ireland's favourite new indie band come good again on a track that's long been a mainstay of their live shows. It's a more electronic offering, with Van McCann-inspired vocals and Arctics *Suck It And See*-era guitar licks.

REAL ESTATE FEAT. SYLVAN ESSO
Paper Cup

The warm and meticulous guitar work backed by synths and melancholy lyrics here are typical of Real Estate. However, the cameo from Sylvan Esso and added orchestral work imply their new album is more complex than ever.

TAME IMPALA
Lost In Yesterday

After teasing it on their Instagram page, TP have formally released this single from their fourth LP, *The Slow Rush*. Rebounding bass lines are counterpointed with smooth Mellotron and arpeggiated guitars. Another classic album beckons.

BOMBAY BICYCLE CLUB
Is It Real

BBC's new UK Top 5 LP is out now, with this being the fifth single. Foraying into nostalgic BBC territory, it's full of undulating basslines and sweet indie guitar lines.

STEPHEN MALKMUS
Xian Man

The lead single from the former Pavement man's folk-inspired LP *Traditional Techniques* (with Matt Sweeney a prominent guest) largely features acoustic instruments, including 12-string guitar and flutes.

SOCCER MOMMY
Circle The Drain

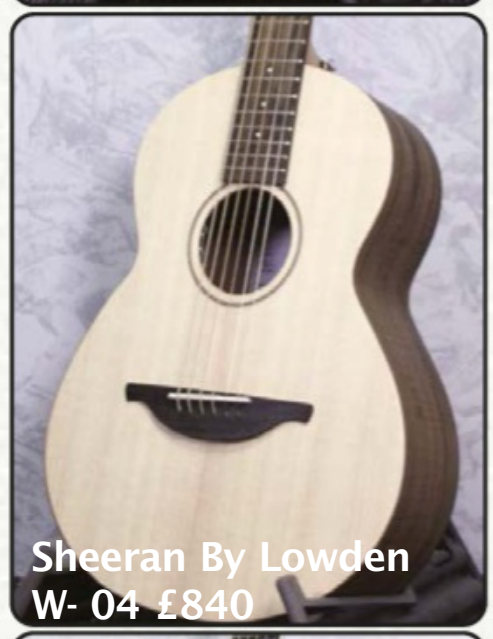
Sophie Allison returns with a taste of *Color Theory*, her first LP for the Loma Vista label. Filtered guitars and sultry vocals open the track, before lulling into Weezer-cum-slacker rock territory. Check out her purple-sparkle Novo in the video.

Forsyth
Est 1857

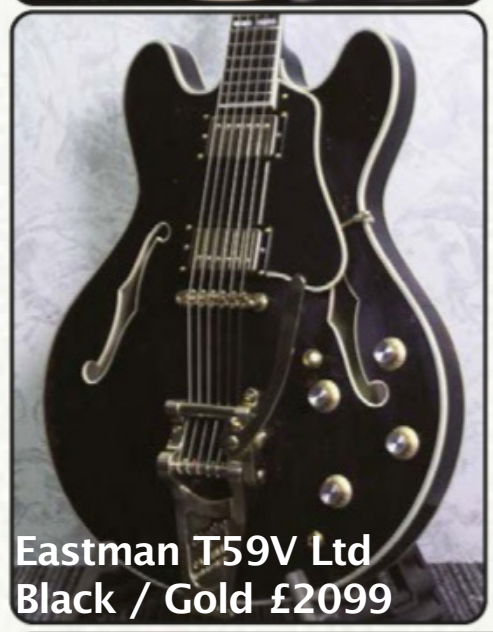
Highlights Of The Month

Martin D- 222 Ltd
RRP£5499
Special price £3349

Atkin "The '38"
£3499


Sheeran By Lowden
W- 04 £840

Gordon Smith
Burltop Special £1999


Eastman T59V Ltd
Black / Gold £2099

Godin ACS SG
Denim Blue £1499

ACOUSTICS
Main dealer for Lowden, Atkin, Brook, Sheeran, Patrick James Eggle, Martin, Faith, Auden, Seagull, Fender, Eastman, Aria, Crafter, Maton, Furch, Tanglewood

CLASSICALS
Main dealer for Buguet, Ramirez, Raimundo, Ortega, Admira, Cordoba and Strunal

ELECTRICS AND BASSES
Main dealer for Rickenbacker, Gordon Smith, Eastman, Fender, Gretsch, Danelectro, Maton, Squier, Revelation, Aria, Hofner, Godin, Cort

Repair department specialising in acoustic and electric guitars

Spread across five stories in the heart of Manchester, Forsyth specialise in a full range of musical instruments, sheet music, a recorded music department specialising in classical and jazz and instrument repair

www.forsyths.co.uk/guitars
Forsyth Brothers Ltd, 126 Deansgate, Manchester M3 2GR
@ForsythMusic Forsyths.Music.Shop

COMPETITION

WIN A TEISCO BOOST AND FUZZ
WORTH £298

Formerly a Japanese guitar manufacturer known for its cheap and cheerful instruments that became popular with garage rockers and indie musicians, Teisco was relaunched in 2019 as a boutique-style pedal company that stays true to the brand's eccentric reputation. Now made in Singapore, Teisco's pedals don't look or feel old, but are enclosed in weighty, zinc-shelled units, with a uniquely low-slung form factor and rounded edges.

While the company launched a trio of new boxes at NAMM 2020, we're giving you the chance to get your hands on two of the impressive stompers from the first salvo launched in 2019, the simply named Boost and Fuzz.

To enter this great competition, simply head to the link below and answer the following question.

Where are Teisco pedals made?

a) Japan **b)** Singapore **c)** UK

Enter at guitar.com/competitions
The closing date for this competition is 23:59 GMT, 6 March 2020. Good luck!

Terms & Conditions

The closing date is **23:59 GMT, 6 March 2020**. The company's decision is final. The competition is open to UK residents only. When entering Guitar Magazine competitions, you will be given the option to receive details of future promotions from BandLab UK Limited and related third parties. If you do not want to receive this information, you can opt out. This giveaway is open to over 18s only. For full terms and conditions, please go to bnd.la/gm-ctos.

WARM AUDIO

Creating Inside The Box.

DIRECT BOX ACTIVE

$199 USD | 219 € INC VAT

- Custom-wound CineMag USA transformer.
- Converts instruments to mic-level signals without signal degradation.
- Ideal solution for plugging your instrument direct into any mic pre, mixer or recording device.
- Top-quality discrete components with gold-plated traces on circuit board.
- Rugged aluminum chassis construction.
- Pad: Variable from -3dB to -30dB.
- Balanced Output: 600 ohms, mic level.
- Input Impedance: 1 Meg Ohms.
- THD: .01% from 20Hz to 50Hz. Less than .003% from 50Hz to 20kHz.
- Frequency Response: 10Hz to 90kHz +/- 0.5dB.
- Linear Performance: +/- 0.05dB 20Hz to 50kHz.
- Power: 48V Phantom or two 9V batteries. Can also be used passively.

DIRECT BOX PASSIVE

$149 USD | 179 € INC VAT

- Custom-wound CineMag USA transformer.
- Converts instruments to mic-level signals without signal degradation.
- Ideal solution for plugging your instrument direct into any mic pre, mixer or recording device.
- Top-quality discrete components with gold-plated traces on circuit board.
- Rugged aluminum chassis construction.
- Pad: Variable from -3 to -30dB.
- Balanced Output: 600 ohms, mic level.
- Input Impedance: 1 Meg Ohms.
- THD: .01% from 20Hz to 100Hz. Less than .004% from 100Hz to 20kHz.
- Frequency Response: 20Hz to 70kHz +/- 0.5dB.

AVAILABLE IN STORES NOW!

CineMag
USA TRANSFORMERS

WWW.WARMAUDIO.COM

© 2020 Warm Audio LLC . All Rights Reserved

RHYTHM
TREBLE

GIBSON
SLASH COLLECTION LES PAUL STANDARD & J-45 STANDARD

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Gibson and the world's leading top hat wearing rocker team up anew for a collection of electric and acoustic signature models

Slash tests a prototype of his new LP at the Hammersmith Apollo

© Eleanor Jane

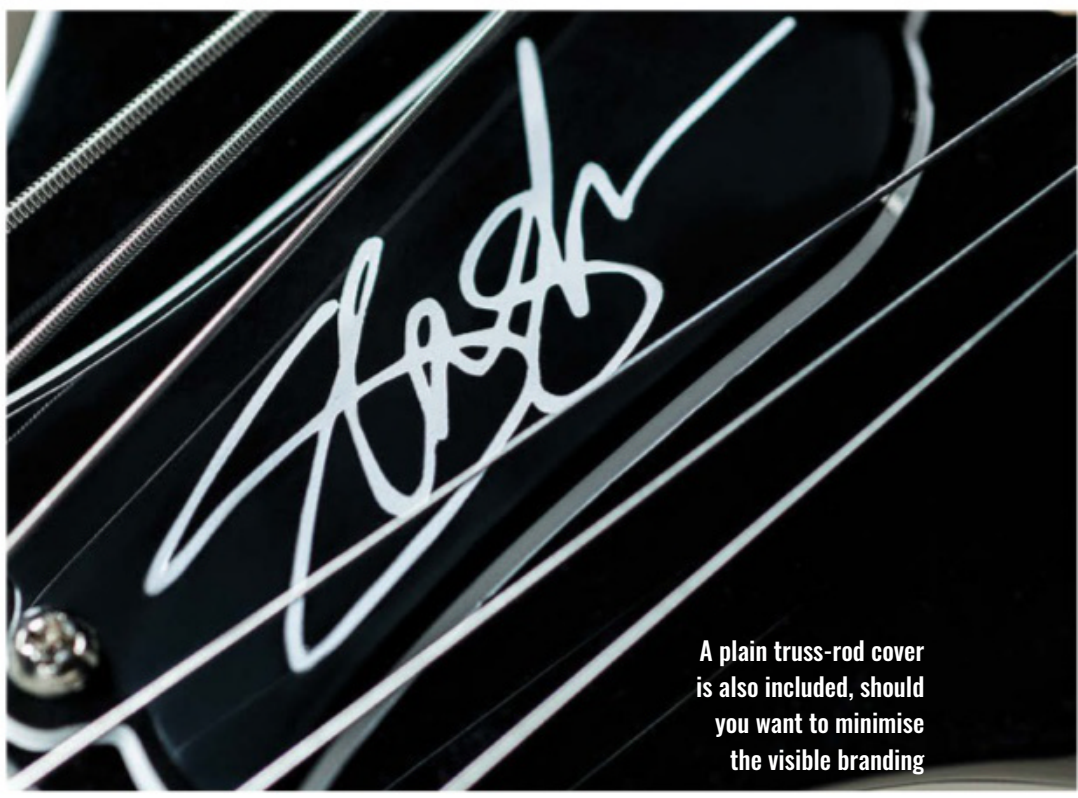
Picture this. It's a grey morning on the last Friday 13th of 2019 and we have been invited to the sumptuous Gibson Guitars HQ in central London to review not just a new model, but a whole signature collection of guitars created by Gibson for one of its longest standing and highest profile artists, the mighty Slash himself.

Upon arrival we are welcomed into the Made 2 Measure lounge – the guitar equivalent of a Savile Row tailor's fitting room. Here, the Gibson London team fosters a convivial environment where the well-heeled client can specify the exact stripe of maple, shade of burst and carve of neck on a bespoke instrument. It is an oasis of calm for even the most jaded of six-stringers and, arrayed for our attention, we find the entire Slash Collection, comprising four Les Paul Standard electrics and two J-45 electro-acoustics.

The contrast between the genteel surroundings and the obvious rock 'n' roll leanings of this collection is most apparent in the array of nitrocellulose finish options available. While Appetite Burst and November Burst are lovingly-blended takes on a faded lemon and a dark-edged tobacco burst respectively, Vermillion Burst (a rich crimson) and Anaconda Burst (an inescapable shade of green) may not be immediately obvious choices for the average Les Paul fan. The coverless humbucking pickups and Slash's 'Skully' logo on the truss-rod cover (a plain one is

Slash's 'Skully' motif resides on the rear of the headstock

The Les Paul's fretboard is rosewood, with medium-jumbo frets



A plain truss-rod cover is also included, should you want to minimise the visible branding

The tone controls are equipped with Orange Drop capacitors

Controls and bridge are traditional – there is no gimmickry, here

also included in the case should you wish) serve to emphasise the fact that these are instruments created with the expressed intention of rocking out at a senior level.

Even the J-45s – for decades Gibson's venerable acoustic workhorses – have a streetfighter feel to them with their brooding burst finishes (November and Vermillion only in this case), Grover machine heads and visibly meaty necks.

This is the first time Gibson and Slash have worked together on an acoustic instrument and the fact that the man himself has been putting the prototypes and first production models through their paces on stages around the world certainly bodes well. Indeed, Slash has road-tested both new Slash Collection guitars to make sure they are 100 per cent to his demands.

SLASH COLLECTION LES PAUL STANDARD

The Les Paul can be a tricky guitar. Although it's the holy grail for many, the design has several inherent quirks that can make for a challenging playing experience. The concentrated weight in such a small body, string break angle over the nut and slightly ungainly top fret access can mean it's a less than easy squeeze, especially for the seated player. Of course, the more you attempt to "correct" these issues with chambered, weight-relieved bodies, sculpted neck-joins – a process rather like fitting tank treads to a Jaguar E-Type to improve its off-road performance – the less of the guitar's true character remains.

As might be expected, Slash and Gibson's approach here is a laudable "Suck it up, Buttercup". This is a true Les Paul, heavy, with no effete concessions to ergonomics or lumbar issues. With a wide leather strap, the Les Paul comes into its own, and with ours set somewhat higher than Slash's knee-level approach, the weight of the guitar is distributed evenly across the player's body and the instrument's balance point effortlessly brings the neck up to a natural playing position for the fretting hand.

And what a neck it is – based on a robust vintage 50s 'C' carve, it fills the hand beautifully and feels fast and immediate along its length. Slash's hand-drawn Skully logo is revisited in silkscreened gold on the rear of the headstock of all these instruments as a reminder of its provenance. If you've read this far, that may not even be a deal-breaker for you.

The bound Indian rosewood fingerboard looks and feels excellent. In darker times in Gibson's history this area was often an Achilles heel in terms of production consistency, but the fretwork, binding and finish here is executed to a very high standard, as is the cream body binding.

The Les Pauls are fitted with vintage-style keystone tuners and a Graph Tech nut

Pickups are Custom Slashbuckers, of course

Not for Slash the more demure figuring seen on some Les Pauls – instead the carved cap is AAA grade flame maple, well book-matched and resplendent under the nitro finish.

IN USE

Gibson's downstairs artist space provides everything you could need to fully evaluate a guitar bearing Slash's name, including a raised stage, full lighting rig and a Marshall Silver Jubilee half stack. With the volume and gain dimed and exchanging slightly manic grins, we plug in – basking in the smooth scream of harmonic feedback as the guitar and amp do what they were made for.

There was a time, before amp modelling and in-ear monitors, when dinosaurs stalked the earth and if you didn't have to reach over your head to adjust the controls, your amp was too small. For a moment we are transported back to that golden era of rock guitar with the visceral, trouser-flapping fury of a Les Paul through a molten tube amp. And it is glorious.

The pickups are custom Slashbuckers (natch) and while their default voice veers towards the aggressive side, it takes very little effort to pull out convincing Peter Green and early Clapton tones from the guitar. The neck humbucker is warm and jazzy with the volume rolled back and exhibits some of the detail and cut of an original Burst.

The middle setting is particularly beautiful for clean picked rhythm lines with a Dave Navarro kind of feel, and the bridge humbucker takes us back from leather kilt to leather trousers with a primal grunt that encourages palm-muted chugging and pentatonic histrionics in equal measure. The fingerboard is precise and grippy, perfect for the long, expressive bends and slow vibrato characteristic of Slash's playing, and the guitar has all the sustain you'd expect.

Everything 'wrong' with the Les Paul design remains as wonderfully wrong as it ever was with this instrument. Everything right with it has been fine-tuned to offer an exhilarating rock guitar experience. Even if your passion for Slash himself runs towards the tepid side these days, this is a very good LP indeed.

SLASH COLLECTION J-45 STANDARD

Gibson's iconic J-45 design has been a stalwart of the company's acoustic range

18+

WHAT IS AVAXHOME?

AVAXHOME-

the biggest Internet portal, providing you various content: brand new books, trending movies, fresh magazines, hot games, recent software, latest music releases.

Unlimited satisfaction one low price
Cheap constant access to piping hot media
Protect your downloadings from Big brother
Safer, than torrent-trackers

18 years of seamless operation and our users' satisfaction

All languages
Brand new content
One site

AVXLIVE.ICU

AvaxHome - Your End Place

We have everything for all of your needs. Just open https://avxlive.icu

CODAMUSIC

www.coda-music.com

SHRINK OUTSIDE THE BOX

MORE COMPACT, SAME IMPACT.

Transport the greats with you. The Studio range brings you iconic Marshall tones in a portable 20W format.

Marshall amplifiers available at Coda Music

51a High Street, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3AH t: 01438 350 815 e: stevenage@coda-music.co.uk
Acoustic Centre 27b Church Lane, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3QW t: 01438 350815 e: acoustics@coda-music.com

Instant decision 9 months 0% finance
available on all new products over £300 on our website

The X-braced Sitka soundboard offers big and lively tone

The rosewood fingerboard is simple, with 20 medium frets

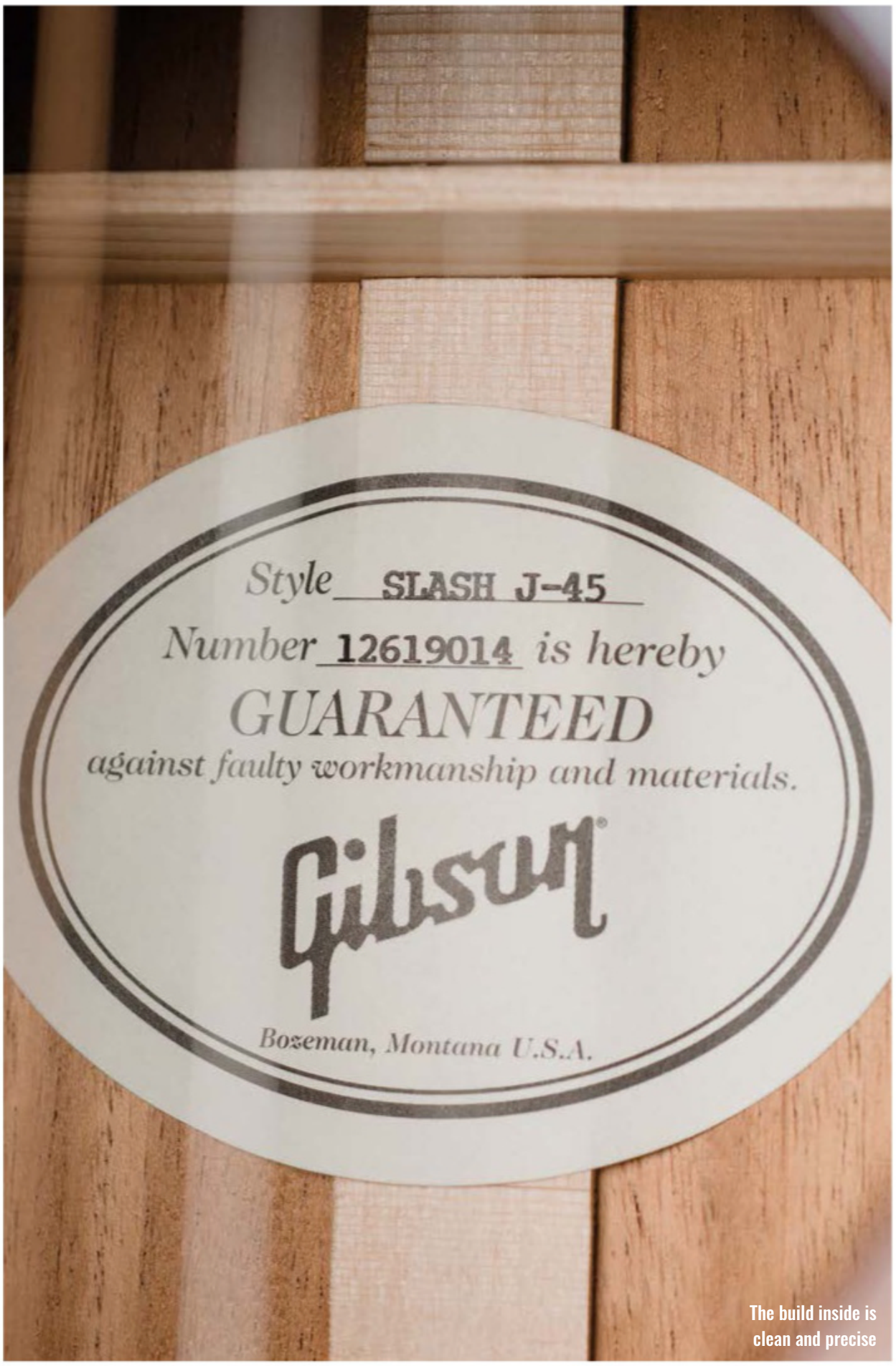
since 1942 and while it has undergone several revisions since then, this is arguably the first instance of a J-45 built explicitly with the aim of serving precious metal balladry to adoring audiences at stadium volumes.

With these tender ends in mind, Gibson has employed a scalloped X-braced Sitka spruce soundboard over genuine mahogany back and sides, active LR Baggs electronics and a deep 'C'-carved mahogany neck. The body is bound fore and aft in cream plastic, with no heel cap, while the dark rosewood fretboard is left bare, save for mother-of-pearl dot position markers.

Light in weight despite the active pickup system, the J-45 feels comfortable both seated and standing and simply handling the instrument reveals a lively soundboard with a big sweet spot behind the bridge. The Grover tuners, a popular retro-fit amongst J-45 owners with more rigorous tuning standards, do their job and the well-cut nut makes smooth work of fine adjustments.

IN USE

The first thing we notice about the Slash J-45 is how well the chunky neck translates into open position chord playing. There is a school of thought amongst acoustic guitar luthiers that a stiffer, bigger neck prevents energy being wasted along its length. In this



The build inside is clean and precise

case there is certainly a lot of power coming from the soundboard, especially with a pick.

Fingerpicked, it's a less convincing story but this is not a subtle, delicate acoustic voice nor do we believe that was Gibson's intention with this guitar. Instead we are confronted with a muscular, chugging rhythm machine with the clear, fundamental range typical of a mahogany slope shoulder dread smoothed off by the scalloped X-bracing of the Sitka top. There is more than enough power here to fill a room unplugged, and the professional pickup system delivers a convincing, stage-ready performance within a mix.

While Slash has pressed double-neck and 12-string acoustic guitars by Guild into service over the years, the more time we spend with the J-45 Standard model,

The J-45 is Slash's first acoustic collaboration with Gibson

The J-45 bridge is a traditional belly-up rosewood design

Binding and inlays are simple and neat

The build quality of both Slash Collection review models is truly superb

the more we feel that it just makes sense for him. It's brash and in your face but at the same time retains a lot of the feel and character of a vintage Gibson acoustic.

Even for a company that was founded well over a hundred years ago, Gibson has had a colourful, sometimes glorious and sometimes chequered past. The same could be said of Slash himself and it's true that some player/guitar maker relationships just work, no matter what.

The stated aim of the Nashville company's new leadership is to strip away the distractions and concentrate on what has made the Gibson such an integral part of music history since 1902. It could be argued that the most effective way to do that would be to draw on that same heritage to make the very best instruments possible and in the Slash Collection it has created a line of unapologetically rowdy, extremely characterful guitars that do their intended job perfectly. What more could you wish for?

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

SLASH LES PAUL STANDARD
PRICE £2,599 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Mahogany body, AAA maple cap and 50s vintage-carve set mahogany neck. Rosewood fretboard with 12-inch radius, Graph Tech nut, 22 medium-jumbo frets
HARDWARE Tune-O-Matic bridge, aluminium stop bar tailpiece, vintage-style keystone tuners, straplocks
ELECTRONICS Custom Slashbucker humbucking pickups, 2x volume, 2x tone with Orange Drop capacitors, 3-way selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628.6mm
FINISH November Burst (as reviewed), Appetite Burst, Vermillion Burst, Anaconda Burst nitrocellulose

9/10 **Slash's latest signature Les Paul is a stripped-down, fire-breathing machine**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

PRS McCarty Singlecut 594 **£3,949**, Eastman SB59 **£1,599**, Maybach Lester '58 Aged **£1,800**

KEY FEATURES

SLASH J-45 STANDARD
PRICE £2,999 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION All solid wood 6-string acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Mahogany back and sides with a Sitka spruce top, scalloped X-bracing, mahogany neck with vintage 'C' carve, rosewood fingerboard with 12-inch radius and 20 medium frets
HARDWARE Traditional belly-up rosewood bridge, Grover Rotomatic tuners
ELECTRONICS LR Baggs VTC active pickup system with volume and tone controls
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/628.6mm
FINISH November Burst (as reviewed), Vermillion Burst
CONTACT gibson.com

8/10 **Gibson trades subtlety for power with this uncompromising strummer**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Martin DSS-17 Whiskey Sunset **£1,645**, Taylor Builder's Edition 717e Grand Pacific **£3,359**, Collings CJ-35 Sunburst **£5,725**

PEDIGREED SHREDDERS

PRO-MOD

SO-CAL

STYLE 1

© 2018 JCMI. Charvel® and the distinctive headstock designs commonly found on Charvel guitars are registered trademarks of Fender Musical Instruments Corporation and used herein under license to JCMI. All rights reserved.

CHARVEL®

charvel.com

A NEW ERA

As Gibson releases the Slash Collection Les Pauls and acoustics, we talk to the man himself about developing the new range, his relationship with Gibson, and how the dynamic of the company has changed since it emerged from bankruptcy

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

Slash doesn't get to NAMM very often any more. After all, when you're perhaps the most famous and recognisable guitarist on the planet, it's hard to walk around the show floor without it turning into, in his own words, "a shit show".

But for NAMM 2020 Mr Hudson had something special to show the world – a brand new collection of Gibson guitars, including all-new signature Les Pauls and for the first time ever, a signature J-45 acoustic.

To celebrate the event, Slash and some famous musician friends took over a ballroom near the Anaheim Convention Center and had a good ol' time. Before the event, however, he took some time out to chat about the new range and more.

So how does it feel being the first artist at Gibson to have their own collection, not just a signature model?

"It's cool because in the past I've had individual Slash models, that are limited edition that would come out through the Custom Shop and that was it, but it's just really nice to have a USA model – that you can look at the catalogue and it's there all the time.

"And also just to make guitars that are more affordable, because the Custom Shop guitars were custom guitars and they were handmade, y'know? Anytime anybody wanted to get one of those guitars, you have to fork out fuckin' a lot of money! So I'm really happy to be working with Gibson on these USA guitars – I mean, I've got one that I've been using for the last few months that plays amazingly, so I'm just really stoked about it."

You worked closely with Gibson CMO Cesar Gueikian on the range, you guys seem to have really developed a good rapport...

"We hit it off right away, on the first day I met him – he's so enthusiastic. He's a huge guitar fanatic – obviously a really smart businessman – but he has a great vision for keeping the heritage of the company intact. And also the future of the company, keeping it within the realms of what us guitar purists are into – not taking it left-field to the point where nobody can relate to it. And so his ideas really meshed with where I saw the company should be, and that was great. And we talked about doing some guitars and everything was super copacetic."

What's the biggest difference between the old Slash guitars and the new Les Pauls for you?

"It's an interesting thing – before I even got a new 'Cesar era' Les Paul, I noticed a different vibe just in seeing the print ads. There was something about the vibe that was exciting. And then the first guitars that I saw, Cesar brought me over one of all the different models that they were going to be coming out with, and they just all felt crisp and tight and put together.

"One of the problems I had with some of the USA guitars a while back was I felt like there wasn't as much

Slash photo by Eleanor Jane

focus on the way that they were set up. Not because the USA guys were putting them together wrong, but I think it was just a general disillusionment that developed over time, and you could tell that maybe they were not as enthusiastic about it as they are now.

"This is one of the iconic things in pop culture, y'know? It's like Fender doesn't need to play around with the Strats! If you want to have one line that's totally out of the ordinary, it's great, but to take the whole company and sort of set it in this direction… There was a time when if you went into a guitar store and you wanted to buy a new Les Paul, you had to have the robo-tuners. And that was not really what people wanted – it's sort of like Apple when they stuck that U2 record in your phone!"

This collection features your first ever signature acoustic, which is a bit different to what we're used to seeing from you...

"I actually do a lot of acoustic stuff, though you might not really know me for it. I'm not a folk guitarist or anything, but when we're talking about new guitars that came up, because at that point, I was taking acoustics out on the Guns tour because few different songs in the set were acoustic. So that made perfect sense to me, and the J-45 was already the particular model of Gibson acoustic that I used."

This is quite different to a regular J-45 though?

"It was really modelled after just my own particular tastes, so it's almost like it's a J-45S! It was really what I wanted for an acoustic. I took the regular J-45 and tweaked the specs to make sure they're right for me – the neck wasn't too small, and we spent a little bit of time spent making sure the piezo was right.

"I've done a lot of experimenting with piezos and I'm not generally a big fan of the sound of electro-acoustics, because they just don't have that rich sound. But in a live situation, there's just no way to replicate the sound, because mic'ing stuff is just too unpredictable."

Now that you've got acoustics and Les Pauls, do you think you'd like to expand the Slash collection in the future? After all, Gibson has just overhauled the Epiphone line...

"Well, I shouldn't speak out of turn, but I would like to do an Epiphone line. What we're discussing now is another Goldtop, instead of it being a Custom Shop model. I love Goldtops, so I would love to have that."

The last time we spoke you talked about how much you were getting into the sound of the P-90s in your Goldtop...

"I have been in the studio, but I've tried it live and it just doesn't work out, because then the amps are too much. But in the studio, there's a certain kind of crisp clarity you get out of the P-90s that you just don't get out of the humbucker.

"That was definitely a revelation for me in the studio – I was the last one to realise! In the studio I'm using my AFD [Les Paul] and a couple other reissue '59s, but I like knowing that I can always go to the P-90s if I need it for something specific."

You're playing a big concert at NAMM this evening with a few special guests – is it fun to get up and play without any real expectations from the fans?

"Yeah it is fun. I'm playing with Don Felder for the first time, so that's really cool – I like Don, he's the guy. And then there's also my buddy Billy Gibbons, and Rick Nielsen, who's an old friend of mine. Rick especially is fun to play with, so that's all great. And Jimmy Vivino is like the bandleader who's put it all together, so it's just fun to get up and play and do some cool songs that we picked just to jam on."

You probably don't get much chance to jam on stage any more.

"Yeah, I mean, like I jam in bars and things and have done for a long time, but I haven't been recently because I've been too fucking busy, so this will be fun tonight. And then I start Guns rehearsals on Friday!"

Speaking of Guns, have you got anything more you can share about the new album?

"There's been no definitive answer on anything and I'll just keep to that. Stuff is happening, but there are no specifics. More than anything, it's because of the nature of the industry right now. It's just like, how do you want to do this? I mean there's material and there's recording and there's shit going on, but we're not really sure what we're doing with it right now."

The music industry in 2020 is very different to the last time you all made a Guns record together...

"Yeah! And there's a handful people who said, 'Yeah, make a record and go old school'. And there's a handful of people that are like, 'We don't even know what buying a record is any more!'"

As a long-term Gibson ambassador then, what would you say has been the best and most exciting thing you've experienced since the new management came onboard?

"That day that he brought all those guitars over, that was pretty exciting. And the conversation that ensued from that with Cesar, where we talked about where he was going to go with the company. Because the future of the company was looking pretty bleak for a second. So that was that was initially the most exciting, and then getting my hands dirty with this USA line, and working with them really tightly…"

Is the process much different than how it was when you were doing stuff with Gibson previously?

"Yeah, there's a dynamic difference – not in my ideas, but in the way that I can relate to the people. Some of these people I've known forever, and the dynamic is different because they now have the freedom to do what they know they should." G

What Gibson Did Next

Gibson CMO Cesar Gueikian on designing guitars with Slash, meeting his heroes, the positives and pitfalls of social media, and why he's learning from past mistakes to help the brand move into a brighter future

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

It's been just over a year since Gibson made a triumphant return to the NAMM Show, with the new ownership making sweeping changes to their range that finally gave fans what they'd wanted for years – production guitars that were informed by the iconic instruments that made the brand a household name. The 12 months since has not always been smooth sailing, but as Gibson enters a new decade, the company is bristling with intent, ambition and a determination to embed Gibson firmly at the heart of the guitar world again.

Cesar Gueikian is at the forefront of all of this. Gibson's softly-spoken CMO has been perhaps the most pivotal figure in the rapid and radical overhaul of the brand's product line since it emerged from bankruptcy in late 2018, and as a lifetime guitar obsessive and Gibson fan, one of the most visible faces of the rejuvenated brand.

As the company prepared to return to NAMM in 2020 with a veritable cornucopia of exciting new launches, we caught up with Cesar to look back on the first year of 'new' Gibson, what he's learned, what he regrets and why he's excited about the future…

ABOVE Inside the Gibson USA factory in Nashville, Tennessee

It's been almost exactly a year since Gibson returned to NAMM – the response at the time was universally positive from fans and media alike, but how were you feeling in the run up to that 2019 show?

"To be honest it was a monstrous combination of being very nervous, a huge sense of anticipation about how it was going to be received, and a lot of excitement all blended in! We had a very short time frame from when we were finally able to take control of the company on 1 November 2018, and NAMM began on 24 January. And we couldn't call the NAMM organisers and be like, 'Hey guys, we need an extra 30 days.'

"The conclusion from our artists and our fans and our dealers was that Gibson was back. We would never say this ourselves – because we like to let our fans, our dealers, our artists and the media do that – but they were all saying it.

"That was a really good reward at the end of a long couple of days. To show the world what we were up to, what our plans were, and to come back in a really strong way that leveraged our iconic past and looking towards the future in a way that keeps us relevant."

You were obviously a guitar fan and Gibson obsessive long before you joined the company – does that make you feel an extra sense of both responsibility and privilege in what you do?

"It is an amazing, incredibly big responsibility. I see myself as having to be the best custodian of the brand that I can be, but I also have the obligation to help lead the company into a future that makes music matter more than ever, that makes guitars matter more than ever, and makes Gibson a key part of that movement. That's a huge obligation for me.

"I'd been working for the last 20 years, mainly buying companies that had got themselves in problems and returning them to growth. So I was able to combine that background with my number one passion, which is music and the guitar. And not just any guitar, it's the Gibson guitar – a year and a half

ago I had 100 guitars in my collection and 80 of them were Gibsons. Every day I feel so lucky, and that I've had the opportunity of a lifetime."

The guitars Gibson has been making over the last year have been much better received than many of the pre-bankruptcy instruments – can you explain a little about how you were able to change things so quickly?

"We can't create success, but we can create the conditions for success. So one of the key things we did was to redo the factory floor, building a modern-day manufacturing flow, that celebrates craftsmanship, with an obsession with quality. We then hired a team of quality engineers, led by Eric Purcell who ran quality at Tesla, to be our quality ninjas across every step of the process.

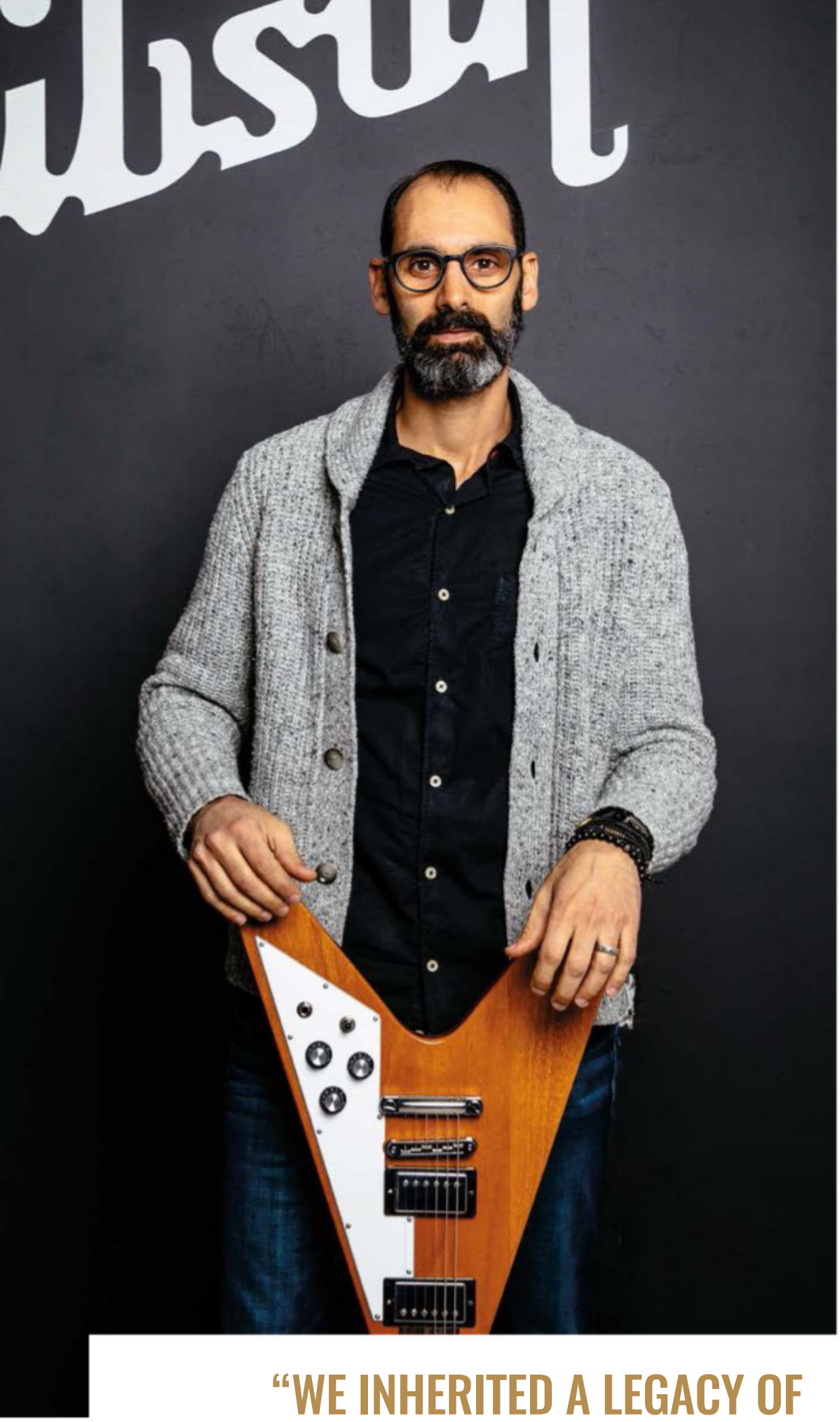
"Then, what I overlaid onto that was a focus on historical spec with regards to how we were going to recalibrate our collections. Asking; what do our fans expect from the specs of each one of our guitars? And how we go about preserving the classics, while also developing more modern instruments?

"And then there was also the launching of the Gibson Lab, which I lead, which is all about testing. We're never going to put something in a guitar just because I think it's cool, or JC [Gibson Chief Executive Officer James Curleigh] thinks it's cool – it's going to go through the Lab, it's going to get tested, it's going to go our artists in the Gibson Alliance to test them and take them on stage.

"The Original Collection is never going to change, and only get amplified, but the Modern Collection is going to find the new things and continue with our research and development."

"OUR GUITARS ARE HAND-MADE, SO THEY'RE NEVER GOING TO BE 100 PER CENT CONSISTENT"

ABOVE Gibson's factory has been revamped under its new leadership, being specifically designed for a "modern-day manufacturing flow"



“WE INHERITED A LEGACY OF CONFRONTATION AND LITIGATION, WHICH WE HAVE ESSENTIALLY NOW BEEN PUTTING TO BED”

ABOVE “People want to have a relationship with Gibson,” says Cesar Gueikian

ABOVE RIGHT “Celebrating craftsmanship” – up-close with the stunning 1960 Gibson Hummingbird from the new Custom Shop Historic line

You’re personally very active and open with what you’re doing at Gibson on social media, do you see that as part of Gibson reconnecting with its fans?

“People want to have a relationship with Gibson, and if we are the stewards of the brand then that means that we need to engage with them. When I post something, it’s deliberate – I post something that’s going to create excitement, or is a sneak peak… I know what I’m doing! Because it builds interest for when it officially launches.”

Like your tease of Epiphone guitars getting the Kalamazoo headstock last year, now on the Inspired by Gibson collection...

“Exactly. I started to get a lot of questions about what we were doing with Epiphone, and we’d been working on Epiphone for most of the last year. And one of the main comments was, ‘What are you doing with the headstock?’ So I went to the Custom Shop, and I have a box there that has a lot of original parts and templates, and I laid out those three different Epiphone headstocks up, and a couple of Gibson things around it, took a picture, and put it up.”

One of the most surprising things that Gibson did in 2019 was the Authorized Partnership Program – how has it been working with these small builders to create these licensed Gibson-inspired instruments?

“It’s just an amazing way of celebrating the craftsmanship background that Orville left to us. He started as a one-man shop in Kalamazoo, and if you look at Matthew Hughes from Banker… he’s a one-man shop, and he’s making amazing instruments.

So it's a way to celebrate our past and our history with Orville Gibson.

"We inherited, from the previous owners, a legacy of confrontation and litigation, which we have essentially now been putting to bed. There are literally just one or two situations that we haven't been able to resolve amicably, and not because of a lack of intention on our side. But everything else, why not collaborate with those who are doing really cool things?

"Because they're not doing it with any ill intentions or any thought of copyright infringement, they're thinking about paying tribute to Gibson – they love it so much, they want to make something that is worthy of a Gibson shape.

"The one that's been released so far is Matthew Hughes and Banker and it's garnered him a lot of attention. We're great supporters of his, and the whole purpose of launching the Authorized Partnership Program is to see things like that happen.

"We haven't yet put anything out there, but there's an amazing builder called Leo Scala who I'm working with – Scala Guitars. He has a workshop in LA, and I went there I saw his work and met him – it's amazing what he's doing, and that's something that I think will work by partnering with Kramer."

One of the newest things you've revealed is the Murphy Lab, can you tell us a little bit more about what that is, and what Tom Murphy will be doing at Gibson?

"Tom was one of the original leaders who launched the Gibson Custom Shop 25 years ago, and as everyone knows, he was one of the pioneers of ageing guitars. I am a huge fan of anything that Tom does, and we've become friends. In recent years, Tom has been working exclusively with Gibson but under an independent agreement, and it occurred to me that we needed to cement Tom's legacy in the Gibson history books in a way more powerful way.

TOP This Gibson Custom Firebird V comes in a rainbow of custom colours and is faithful to the non-reverse 1965 original, with Maestro vibrola

ABOVE LEFT A Gibson fan exploring options and tones at NAMM 2020

ABOVE A selection of new 50s Epiphone Les Paul Standards on display in Anaheim

Cesar Gueikian and Tony Iommi portraits courtesy of Gibson Factory and NAMM 2020 photos by Chris Vinnicombe and Joe Supple

TOP The remodelled Epiphone headstock emphasises the link to Gibson

ABOVE LEFT Epiphone's Modern Collection is 'Inspired by Gibson' – here's the SG Classic with P-90s in worn Inverness Green

ABOVE RIGHT Part of Epiphone's Original Collection – this 'Inspired By Gibson' Epiphone Les Paul Special comes in classic TV Yellow and is a serious tone machine for just £349

"So I asked him, 'What if we created the Murphy Lab? And you are now the master artisan of the Murphy Lab, in-house, full-time, creating in the kitchen!' He'll be inventing new concepts, technologies and new ways that we're going to improve the historical accuracy of our guitars.

"The Murphy Lab isn't just a concept, it's a place where Tom is going to be leading us as we're pushing the envelope in authentic ageing, and that's going to be the coolest place in the Custom Shop. And it's not just ageing, it'll be research and development, product testing, scanning original guitars… all that stuff is going to happen inside the Murphy Lab."

Slash has been one of Gibson's most beloved artists over the last 30 years, it must have been fun developing not just a new signature Les Paul with him, but also the new acoustic...

"Slash is a guitar nerd just like me – we go back and forth on text, just sending each other pictures of guitars. I personally worked with Slash on this one, quite heavily. We started by creating a concept that we were comfortable going into prototype mode with, and then taking on feedback from him based on him playing the guitars in the studio and on stage with Myles and The Conspirators, and also with Guns N' Roses.

"All that process of testing, trying different components, changing the pickups, winding the pickups differently, changing the neck, the hardware… all of that was an iterative process with him until we landed on it. And it was the same with both the electric and acoustic.

"The J-45 is the first time that we're doing an acoustic with him, and these guitars are really different and unique compared to any J-45 that you will have played in the past. The way I think about it is a blend of traditional appointments with modern features, because it's got a very big, rounded V profile neck, and a modern 16-inch radius fingerboard.

"As we all know, Slash likes bending, so the 16-inch radius – compared to a 12-inch – allows you to bend the strings a little bit easier while keeping that amazing modern playability. And we also went back and forth with him on tweaking the pickup, and ended up landing on a modified LR Baggs VTC.

"Also, on the Les Paul side, I'd like to mention that for the first time in Gibson's history we're actually doing a three-way collaboration. So Slash developed a new set of Ernie Ball strings that are only going to be available through Ernie Ball direct, and those are the strings that are going to be on the new Les Pauls. And then he uses the Dunlop Tortex picks and so all the guitars, including the acoustics, will come with his picks in the case. So I'm excited about that – a Gibson, Ernie Ball and Dunlop collaboration is definitely a first."

You've also worked with Tony Iommi on creating a signature version of his iconic SG – that feels like it's a special project for you...

"It was an incredible experience for all of us, but for me personally it was the ultimate experience, because I picked up a guitar because of him. The moment that I decided I wanted to play guitar was when I was 10 years old, and I put a vinyl record that my dad had. It was unopened, so I ripped the plastic off and put it on because the cover of the record just spoke to me, and I had to hear it… and that was *Black Sabbath*.

"It was so great having him over in Nashville and showing him what we've been working on… because to me he is the godfather of heavy metal, and that guitar is a huge part of that. When he came to the Custom Shop and the factory, he spent so much time just walking around, talking to people, taking pictures with everyone who wanted to take a picture with him, he signed records… he was there for hours!

"At one point in the main factory, there was an actual line of people waiting to take pictures with him. It meant so much to all of our factory craftsmen and artists

LEFT Working with Tony Iommi on his 'Monkey' SG was "an incredible experience for all of us" says Gueikian

TOP This USA Texan is part of the Epiphone Original line

ABOVE The new Gibson Custom Shop 1964 ES-335 Reissue typifies the brand's renewed attention to period detail and was one of our favourite guitars at NAMM

"WE'RE NEVER GOING TO PUT SOMETHING IN A GUITAR JUST BECAUSE I THINK IT'S COOL, OR JC THINKS IT'S COOL – IT'S GOING TO GO THROUGH THE LAB, IT'S GOING TO GET TESTED"

ABOVE Les Paul, SG and Explorer bodies in progress – it's like watching paint dry!

that he did that, that was one of the proudest moments of the last year, that JC and I always talk about."

Speaking of proud moments then, what's your personal highlight of your first year or so in charge of Gibson?

"I've had so many it's been like drinking from a firehose! But I'm an Armenian born in Argentina, so I grew up with a wide variety of music, and I originally learned to play classical – I wanted to play Black Sabbath but I only had a Spanish guitar at home! And there's a Latin band called Maná that I grew up listening to – they're an incredibly big band, 12 Grammys, 60 million records sold.

"But I developed a really close relationship with them, and they invited me to go on stage with them a couple of times – so we played at the American Airlines Arena in Miami, and the final leg of the tour was seven sold-out nights at the LA Forum, and they invited me to play on their last show. Those moments give me chills.

"And also working with new artists through the Gibson Generation Group. It's so amazing to see the passion of these young guitarists, and they feel incredibly lucky that they're doing this. But we're the lucky ones that are finding this new talent because it's so exciting to make the guitar feel relevant."

On the flipside, there have been a few difficult moments over the last year, is there anything you wish you'd done differently?

"Mark Agnesi is one of the most knowledgeable and amazing Gibson guys, and I've learned so much from him over the years as his client – I've got a lot of

vintage Gibsons from the 50s and 60s that I bought from him. And I always relied on him for knowledge, because I'm a nerd and I want to learn things!

"But I personally made the mistake of having Mark do that video [the now-infamous 'Play Authentic' video – Ed], and if you ask me what I'd like to have done differently, it's that. At the end of the day our objective is for us to protect our fans, and when someone buys a Gibson they expect the quality of a Gibson, and that's a good thing.

"But using social media to try and deliver the message was probably my biggest mistake, and in hindsight, I think I shouldn't have done that. What I was trying to do… I didn't see it as us being 'threatening' or anything like that.

"We want our fans to buy our guitars because they believe we are making the highest quality instruments and that they are made to a higher quality standard than any other manufacturer. And all we wanted to do was to protect them from anything that could in any way be misleading."

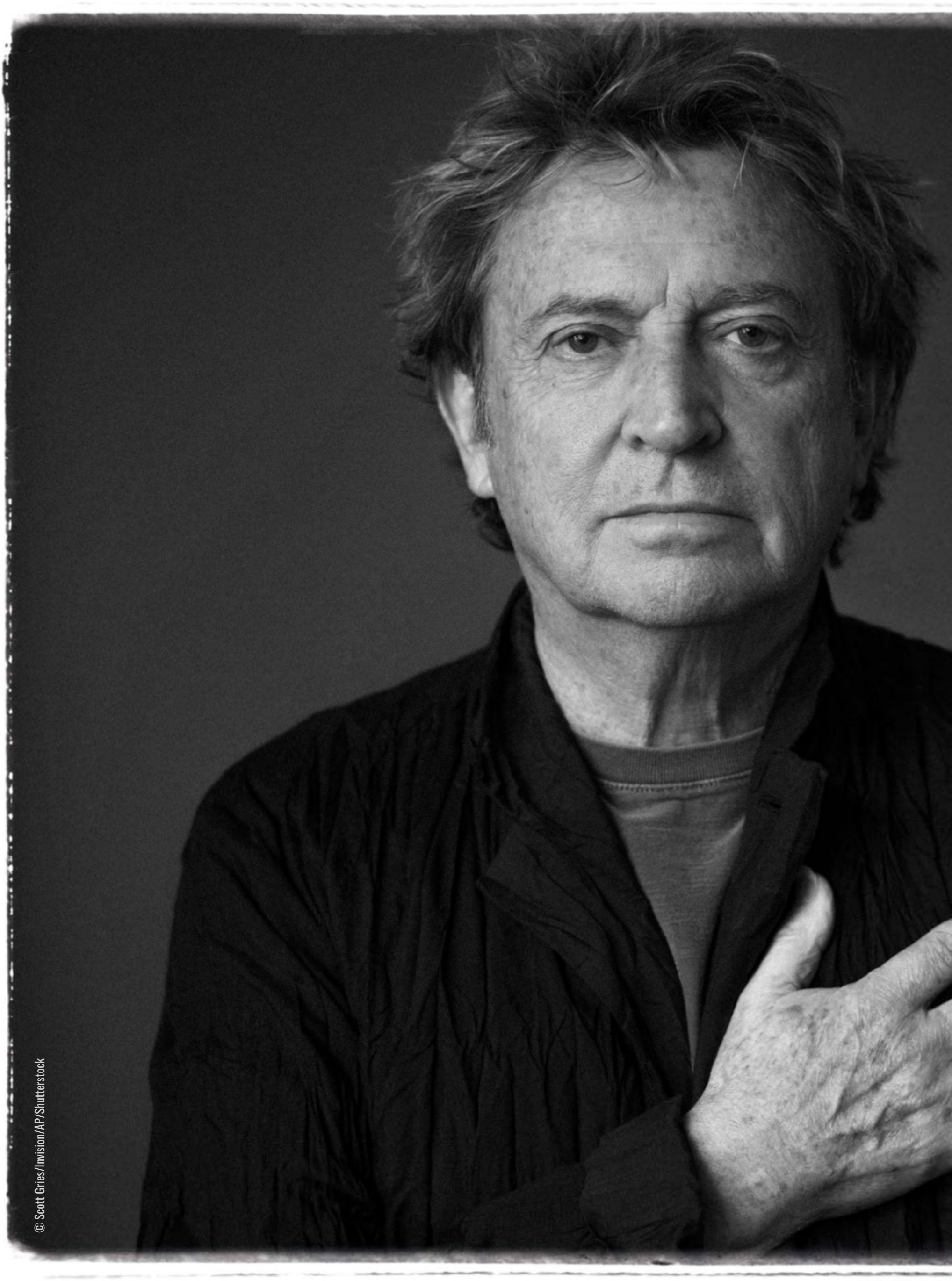
Finally then, what's the biggest lesson that you've learned about Gibson, and about making Gibsons, since you joined?

"The biggest learning from it has been that every step matters. We call them the '15 steps' of the build process – from beginning to end – and my preconceived notion when we came into the company in 2018 was, 'Well first, let's identify the five that are the critical ones… [to making a great guitar]' but in fact, there are 15!

"That's why we needed to create a quality team that best serves what we need – because our guitars are hand-made, so they're never going to be 100 per cent consistent, and of course, every piece of wood is different. So in that pursuit of quality, and for my obsession with quality, that's my biggest learning – that out of the 15 steps… 15 steps matter!" *G*

ABOVE AND LEFT Gibson is now paying extra attention to its finishing, sometimes a matter of concern in previous years

ABOVE Cesar Gueikian shows off a new Gibson Les Paul Standard at the Nashville factory



© Scott Gries/Invision/AP/Shutterstock

THE *Guitar* INTERVIEW

ANDY SUMMERS

WORDS JOSH GARDNER

Andy Summers might have a sackful of Grammys and over a hundred million album sales under his belt from his time as the guitarist in The Police, but the success and adulation has never dulled his desire to learn and create. As he partners with Fender to release a unique instrument that celebrates his twin loves of guitar and photography, we spoke to Summers about Strats, his passion for experimental effects pedals, selling guitars to Eric Clapton, and why the early days of The Police were "a struggle for acceptance"…

"It seems like such a dumb idea to put all these fucking photographs all over the guitar, doesn't it? But I'm really pleased with it!" Andy Summers is not one to mince his words about things, and that even applies to the brand new signature guitar that the legendary guitarist of The Police has just released with the Fender Custom Shop, the Monochrome Strat. The guitar itself is certainly one of the most unusual signature instruments you're likely to see, covered as it is in a collage of Summers' own black and white photographs, and created in partnership with high-end camera maker Leica to celebrate Summers' two loves.

"Photography is one of those things that's been part of my life for many years," Summers enthuses. Alongside my life as a guitarist, I was doing photography all the time as well. I've done exhibitions and shows, and it was always something that was very present in my life. Now that we've done it, it seems like an obvious thing to bring these two things together, but the result is something pretty unusual, for sure!"

Unusual is one word for it, but it's a concept that has clearly enthused and inspired the 77-year-old Englishman. Having originally been dissatisfied with Leica's idea for a Fender-inspired Summers signature

The limited edition Andy Summers-designed Monochrome Stratocaster is adorned with his own photos

camera, he has spent five years refining the concept with Fender and Leica, even coming up with the 'dumb idea' of the photo collage finish that covers both the Monochrome Strat and a Signature Leica M camera that partners it.

"I've been recording with it, and the guitar is great!" Summers exclaims. "It's a wonderful example of the Stratocaster, and it plays like silk! I was going to take it on my last tour of South America but at the last minute, I got a bit paranoid about what might happen to it, because it was the only one in existence at that time! I thought, 'Christ, do I really want to be drifting around South America with this thing?!'"

ON THE PATH

It's entirely fitting that Summers now has a truly unique and truly unusual signature guitar, as from the very start he's always been determined to follow his own path and do things his own way.

"I was given a guitar when I was about 11, by an uncle," Summers explains of his earliest guitar memory. "It was just a little Spanish guitar, minus one string, but the moment I got it in my hands, the road was set! I never thought about anything else ever again. It was incredible to me, and I was absolutely addicted to it from that moment on. The guitar is a very obsessive instrument – it's the ultimate bedroom instrument. I've always had this feeling that I just want to keep pushing on – that's never left me, now I think about it. I always have this thing of, 'Oh I must practise…'"

It's clear that this drive to experience the guitar in new and inspirational ways has been a driving force behind Summers' varied and unique career – from a mid-60s London gun for hire, to classical guitar maestro, to new wave pop megastar and beyond. We can't help but wonder if there's one part of the ride that he cherishes more than any other…

"I don't really do anything unless I feel like I'm really going to enjoy it, and be able to give my best skills and effort to it," he explains. "And so all these things I've done, it's all been outstanding… well not everything, because I've played a lot of shitholes in my life!"

Interestingly, what he does find himself looking most fondly on is one of his most leftfield decisions – when he left behind the London guitar scene in the early 70s to spend five years studying classical guitar and composition at California State University.

"That was a very nice period because I was living in California and studying classical guitar, and I just got to play like a maniac for about five years," he

chuckles. "I maybe had some semi-formed ideas about being a classical guitarist at that point, but really I just wanted to spend a few years getting really heavy and playing shitloads of Bach! It certainly didn't do me any harm, and just being in Los Angeles at that time, there was a great guitar scene, so I was around so much great guitar playing all the time, which was great for me. It was just a time of giving myself over to my obsession with guitar and wanting to get better and understand music in a deeper way.

"And then I came back to the UK and in short order joined The Police, so it meant that by the time I had hooked up with Sting and Stuart I was fully loaded – I put in some 'time in the wilderness' with pretty extreme study and playing. The strange part of it was that I joined a so-called punk band, where you weren't supposed to have all that knowledge, but of course, it all worked itself out."

POLICE STATE

As it turned out, Summers' five-year classical sabbatical armed him with the skills and knowledge that helped him find his feet in the band that would make him a megastar.

"Once I got to know them, it turned out Sting was also a lover of classical guitar – Villa-Lobos, Bach and the like – and I was actually able to play all this stuff, so that was an instant hook between the two of us," Summers recalls. "We also both came from a background of listening to Thelonius Monk and Miles Davis… all the great jazz from that period, so we had a very common vocabulary between us.

"The stricture of that was that we were in a rock band! So whatever we did, we had to somehow turn it into popular music. That is really the miracle of The Police, that all this weird outside stuff got funnelled into these songs that went around the world."

The Police emerged to become one of the leading lights of the new wave scene, but despite that genre's roots in the energy of punk, Summers remembers that their fusion of punk, reggae and pop wasn't an easy sell to the mohawk-and-safety pins crowd…

"THE STRATOCASTER REALLY IS THE GREATEST SOLIDBODY ELECTRIC GUITAR EVER MADE"

"In the early days of The Police it was hard for us to gain acceptance because we were seen as a bit suspect as a bona fide punk band – it was all a load of bullshit really," Summers insists. "But the thing is, we were trying very hard to be a band, just to make a living. But as we played together, the talent emerged to the point where other people pointed out to us that we had a style. And we went, 'Oh yeah… I guess we'd better do that then!' We did this unwitting thing that came about just because of what we could do, and it turned out to be rather popular.

"We always knew that we didn't want to sound like anybody else. And so we started not trying to sound like a punk band. We were also pretty sure that we never wanted to play in a support slot, we only wanted to headline, even if it was in a tiny spot – we'd rather play to three people as the headliner.

"The first couple of years of The Police were just so exciting because we basically rose to become basically the hottest band in the world at that point. And then the career we had with it was great, but I've had so many years of enjoyment just making records after that – I don't think I've ever gone off the 'true path'."

STRATS ENTERTAINMENT

If your knowledge of Summers' guitar playing is primarily focussed on The Police, you might be surprised that his choice of signature instrument isn't based on the guitar that was a near-constant presence in that band… but his relationship with the Telecaster is a complicated one.

"I'm not really a purist – the standard Telecaster thing is not really my thing," he explains. "A lot of guys who play Telecasters, their sound is very bright

© Richard E. Aaron/Redferns •Getty Images

“I DIDN’T JUST SELL ERIC CLAPTON MY LES PAUL, I’D TOLD HIM WHERE TO GET HIS IN THE BEGINNING”

and twangy, which just isn’t really for me. So people associate me with it, but I don’t have the cowboy hat to go with it.

“My Telecaster was more of a hybrid – somebody had replaced the neck pickup and put a Gibson humbucker in there, but had also messed around with adding a drive switch into it, powered by a nine-volt battery. That guitar just had an incredible tone, and then it had what was effectively an in-built fuzzbox, which you could then switch on for solos.

“It had something that was almost indefinable – what makes a guitar great? We could be here all day trying to analyse and quantify it, but that one had something magical – that’s why I kept going with it for so long.

“The Telecaster is a wonderful instrument, but in the history of the marvellous creations of Leo Fender… it was his first attempt! Of course, it was an amazing breakthrough, but the Stratocaster was the elegant, refined version of that – and it really is the greatest solidbody electric guitar ever made. There have been a million different variations on it of course, but really Leo got it right in 1954.”

We did say that he wasn’t one to mince his words… but if hearing one of pop music’s most iconic Tele players eulogise over the Strat seems surprising, it shouldn’t be. Summers’ long guitar life has seen him accumulate a hugely varied stable of instruments… but whatever you do don’t call him a collector.

“There are guys out there who just obsess over all that shit, but first and foremost I’m a player,” he explains. “I have a lot of guitars… as most people like me do. But I’m really ready to dump a load of them, to be honest – they just take up so much room. But I’ve accumulated a lot over the years: I have a load of old jazz guitars, I’ve got Nationals, Kleins… I’ve got vintage Strats and things like that. But I definitely don’t describe myself as a ‘collector’. They’re usually a certain type of person, and they’re usually not the players.”

CREAM OF THE COLLECTON

Of the many guitars that Summers has owned over the years ended up playing a part in rock ’n’ roll history. In 1966, Summers sold Eric Clapton a Les Paul Burst to replace the one EC had used on the ‘Beano’ album, and had famously been stolen, never to be recovered, shortly after the album’s release…

"I didn't just sell Eric my Les Paul, I'd told him where to get his in the beginning!" Summers exclaims. Indeed, legend has it that Clapton saw Summers on stage at the Flamingo in London with his '59 and asked him where he got it. Summers responded that he'd bought it from a shop in Charing Cross Road, and that they had another one there for £80… the rest is rock history.

"Of course, if I'd been thinking straight, I would have bought the other one as well!" he chuckles. "I turned him on to buying the first one, and when that got stolen, he pursued me to get my Les Paul. I wasn't really playing it that much – by that time I'd got my first Telecaster, which I thought was a very hip guitar. So after a long time of Eric calling me up about it, I finally let it go… I'd like it back but I'm not sure that's going to happen!"

SIGNATURE MOVES

Andy's days of Les Pauls and Telecasters seem to be behind him in the main, however, and if you've seen him perform on stage recently, chances are he's been using that aforementioned "greatest solidbody electric guitar ever made", the Strat.

Summers did start using Strats in the latter days of his original run with The Police, but his journey to finding his current number one guitar ironically came about as a result of creating a replica of his famous Telecaster with the Fender Custom Shop in 2007.

"When they did the Telecaster, they came to me with a request to make it, and I said, 'Yeah okay, great,'" he recalls. "This whole idea about signature guitars hadn't really occurred to me back then. Usually I have that Telecaster hidden away, but I brought it with me to the studio for them and they took the whole thing apart. It was just… shocking to me! So they took it to pieces and measured it and photographed it and micrometered it and tried to log every possible variance that they could find. When I got the first replica, man, I couldn't tell the difference – quite incredible… and scary, almost."

By pure coincidence, the release of the Andy Summers Telecaster Tribute model coincided with the announcement of The Police's 30th anniversary reunion tour, and the good people at Fender couldn't let Summers go on a 151-date tour without some backup to his trusty '61 Strat…

"They made me Stratocasters for the tour that were replicas of my old '61 – they were never put out for sale," Summers recalls. "In fact, one of those red Strats has become my standard workhorse guitars in the studio, it's just there *all* the time, and I generally start recording on that.

"So when it came to putting this new Stratocaster together, I had these two guitars that Fender had made for the reunion tour, and they were both such wonderful guitars. So I said, 'Let's make it as close to those as possible.'"

BOUNDARY PUSHER

While his heart might belong to a guitar perfected in the 1950s however, Summers' never-ending obsession with 'pushing on' doesn't just apply to his practice routine, but also concerns the instrument itself and the sounds it makes.

"I just think guitar making is such an interesting field, and one that has got more interesting as we've gone along," Summers says. "Which is why I think there are some absolutely fabulous guitars being made by modern makers – some great stuff is being done. The first test for me is that I'll pick up a guitar and ask, 'Does it play well? Am I having this transmission of my soul to the soul of the guitar?' If the answer's no then I'm not that interested."

But while modern guitars have long been an interest of his, what currently stokes Summers' creative fires are a good deal more compact…

"I'm actually more interested in pedals these days," he reveals. "Because some of us are always looking for the newest weirdness you can possibly find, and that's where it tends to be. We're absolutely in the golden era of guitar pedals. It's a real renaissance, because it never used to be like this.

"Sometimes in the compositional process, to keep things fresh, I start with something sonic, instead of 'here's the verse and here are some chords'. So we start from a much more remote sonic place, create a really interesting sound and see if we can make this into a composition that makes sense.

"There's a guy in England, MWFX, who makes this glitch pedal called the Judder – things like that are so good. And it's also the way that you hook them up as well, because we're always messing around trying to combine them and see what happens. It's a lot of fun to have all these nerdy pedals and play around with them and see what you can come up with, and there are some great surprises along the way.

"It turns into a bit of a hobby in itself – putting these things together and thinking, 'Oh my god, how on earth did I do that!?'" G

The Andy Summers Monochrome Strat is available now from select Fender Custom Shop dealers

FACING PAGE With The Police: "In the early days, it was hard for us to gain acceptance"

THIS PAGE Behind the camera... and the behind of his signature Strat

GET BACK

Al Di Meola has revisited his beloved Beatles for a new covers album, *Across The Universe*. Here, the guitar maestro talks about the complexity of the Fab Four, vintage Les Pauls and Marshalls, and discovering his inner Ringo…

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Back in 2012, Al Di Meola walked through the doors of London's fabled Abbey Road studios to record an intimate take on a selection of Lennon and McCartney classics. Due to an extraordinary set of circumstances involving an 1830s Martin guitar, this correspondent was present for one of those original sessions and having experienced Di Meola's masterful nylon-string arrangements up close it came as no surprise when the resulting anthology, *All Your Life*, quickly became one of the best-selling guitar records of the following year.

Now, following several albums of original compositions including 2018's extraordinary *Opus*, Di Meola returns to the music that inspired him to play the guitar in the first place with a new album of Beatles arrangements, this time with a full band sound, titled *Across The Universe – The Beatles Vol 2*. We caught up with Di Meola during a European tour to find out more about his approach to arranging some of the world's best-known melodies.

"Well, it's interesting," he says with understatement, of tackling the world's most famous back catalogue. "These are songs that we all know and love, and I'm very passionate about The Beatles. After doing the first record and being overwhelmed by the response, I wanted to return to The Beatles' back catalogue but this time do it with fuller production.

"Also, in some cases where The Beatles had originally recorded two-minute versions of those songs, I wanted to be able to write some parts and develop those ideas, as I did on *Strawberry Fields Forever* and *Norwegian Wood*. That song was basically a two-minute piece exactly – it's just melody/bridge/melody/bridge and it's over – and it's beautiful! You can play it anywhere and everyone knows it! Of course, in my world, there are no lyrics, so I feel the need as an instrumentalist to bring more to the essence of the piece in terms of composition and that's what you hear on this record."

Di Meola's reverence for the Fab Four runs deep: "It was the whole package, you know? It was stunning in terms of sound. There had not been anything like it before, everyone was trying to reach that benchmark – The Dave Clark Five, The Beach Boys, The Byrds, they all had their own unique thing but they all point to The Beatles. No-one could really surpass that beautiful combination of those voices. Together, The Beatles were a force. What they produced in only six or seven years was just mind-blowing.

"What I wanted to do was take that music that they created and do my own thing with it and just go a little deeper, syncopate some rhythms – things like that. A lot of it was chord melody, if you really examine the recording. Believe it or not, these 'simplistic' pieces turned out to be far more difficult to play and to rehearse than anything I've done before!

"People can say it's just simple pop music but the way I approached it required me to really work hard. It wasn't a simple 'strum the guitar and sing the melody' thing. I usually fragment the harmony into a kind of arpeggiated syncopation for the most part, because it's my signature, but on this record, the melodies are closer to what they were originally.

"For me, the music of The Beatles means pure joy! it's a combination of good feelings that bring you back to a time of innocence and youth, it relaxes me, it just makes you feel good – and good music is supposed to have that effect!"

THE FAB FOUR: TAKE TWO

Di Meola's sonic approach with this new record differs from the intimate nylon-string textures of *All Your Life*, his initial, acoustic-led Beatles covers album released in 2013.

Al Di Meola portraits 2020 © Alexander Mertsch www.bsights.de

"BELIEVE IT OR NOT, THESE 'SIMPLISTIC' PIECES TURNED OUT TO BE FAR MORE DIFFICULT TO PLAY AND TO REHEARSE THAN ANYTHING I'VE DONE BEFORE!"

"Recording *All Your Life* was a tremendous experience, I felt like a five-year-old at Disneyland. I was in the same exact spot [Abbey Road studios] that The Beatles' records happened! It was really an amazing point in my career.

"I wanted to make that first record simplistic and intimate in its production. It certainly wasn't simplistic in the way I played those songs though, it was pretty damn hard – especially *Penny Lane* and *Michelle* – those were brutal.

"The only percussion on *All Your Life* was me tapping on the top of the guitar whereas this time it is almost a full production. I'm playing a Rickenbacker bass, the same model and strings as Paul McCartney [That'll be a 4001S for the low-end enthusiasts – Ed]. I'm playing the drums, I'm playing percussion, I'm playing electric guitar on top of the acoustic guitar so it's almost a one-man-band.

"There's a tabla player on *Norwegian Wood* and *Strawberry Fields Forever*; Randy Brecker [trumpet] plays on *Till There Was You*; and there are also some vocal bits with me and my daughter, and Hernan Romero who also acted as co-producer.

"I know what I want and that's why I did most of the parts myself. If I had brought in a drummer I would have told him to do exactly what I did. And I didn't want or need a flash drummer. In addition, there are some complex rhythms and ideas going on underneath the electric guitar on nylon-string and steel-string guitars. If you have other instruments playing complex ideas on top of that, well, something's got to give!

"Having my own studio, I get to work in a very similar way that The Beatles did on 'The White Album' – they each did their own tracks and they got them the way they wanted them."

Arranging other artists' music poses a different set of challenges to original compositions – part of this is choosing what to keep and develop and what to leave out, though Di Meola says that wasn't his main challenge...

"Choosing the parts was really natural because I feel an extreme closeness to the phrasings of the melodies and how they did it.

"The challenge is in playing it *well*. This is not an album of music that nobody has ever heard before – if you play a wrong note in the melody of a Beatles song… well… that's very different! Of course, the next step is to try and recreate this in a live setting. It's one thing to do this in the studio but another altogether to do it with other players in front of an audience."

BACK IN BLACK

Guitar-wise, this record did involve a selection of Di Meola's regular beautiful instruments as well as a notable reunion with an old friend.

"Whenever you hear a nylon string it's a Conde Hermanos Al Di Meola signature model and that's all over the record. But I also used a Martin D-18, a 1948 model that sings forever and you can hear that quite often. I did use the Ovation [Al Di Meola Signature Model] on *Strawberry Fields...* of all pieces! It just somehow worked on that one. There's a lot of Guild 12-string too, and a 12-string harp guitar which I used on *Here Comes The Sun*.

"However, the thing that's great about this record is that I rediscovered – for the first time since 1978 – my famous black 1971 Gibson Les Paul. That was the guitar I used when I joined Chick Corea, I recorded *Land Of The Midnight Sun* and *Elegant Gypsy* with it. I hadn't used it since because I had been introduced

LEFT AND ABOVE *Across The Universe* sees Al Di Meola reaching for his Les Pauls, playing his black 1971 Custom for the first time in 40 years

to so many other guitars including Paul Reed Smith guitars, so the days of using that 1971 Les Paul through my 50-watt Marshall were long gone.

"You know, there was always a part of me that wondered how I got such a punchy sound back then. The PRS going through the Fuchs amp was close but there was still something missing and it bothered me so much. We were sitting in the studio one day and someone suggested trying the '71 and asked me 'do you still have that old Marshall?'. So, we went digging through piles of equipment out in the garage, down in the basement, and behind a mountain of crap, I found my Marshall 50-watt head from the mid-70s!

"I said, 'Okay, let's plug this thing in, it's not going to work, I haven't used it for 45 years, it's definitely not going to work'. So we plugged it in, hoping all the while that it wouldn't blow up – and it worked! Then we found the cab, I hadn't used that since then either, and the speakers worked too.

"That's the electric guitar and amp that you hear on the record and it was wonderful to rediscover that combination. There's something about the way they made the amps back then, those early DiMarzio pickups, and that super-heavy '71 Les Paul that you just can't beat. And there's no effects. None! You just plug straight in. But you have to set the amp up right… no treble, no presence, bass all the way up and that's the sound.

"Back in the day when Larry DiMarzio was first starting out in Staten Island, I was one of the first guys to use his pickups. He looked at my amp and said 'Wow, that's the way you have your settings? That's exactly how Leslie West does it too!' I was shocked. I was almost embarrassed that people would see my settings and think, 'Wow, he's insane!' but that was the best sound. That Marshall was the gem of all gems, it had to be a 50-watt, the 100-watt versions just didn't sound as good."

The creative side of this record was as much about sounds and textures as it was about technique, there's even an extremely authentic take on a classic Mellotron part.

"Ha! Yes, on *Strawberry Fields Forever*, I played that part myself... I really wanted to recreate that and also get some of those Ringo drum fills from the beginning, because I felt like they were expected.

"On other tracks like *Julia* the arrangement is moved into 6/8 time in drop D tuning and the way that I play that involves a lot of string skipping – it's a kind of arpeggiated chord melody. It can be a little

bit tricky to play but it turned out to be one of my favourite pieces. And sometimes it's the simplicity… it's so heavily rooted around the G, it has an unbelievable aesthetic to it. It's just pure beauty. I don't know how else to say it.

"I am also very proud of my arrangement of *Mother Nature's Son*. It's a chord melody piece that was very, very hard to get right. I practised my balls off for a good two months!"

AL'S LONG AND WINDING ROAD

Reflecting on his extraordinary career to date – since his mid-70s solo debut, he has released over 30 albums under his own name and in collaborations, too – 65-year-old Di Meola is always keen to offer support and guidance for younger players.

"You have to find your influences and learn by trying to do what they do. When I was young I had a great guitar teacher and I was buying all the great records I could – I was a record freak. And of course, I had New York City nearby and I was going to the Fillmore East. Everybody from Hendrix on down was playing there – The Allman Brothers, The Grateful Dead, The Byrds, The Who, Crosby, Stills and Nash, Frank Zappa, everybody! I was going to all these shows and absorbing everything I could. Learning from a teacher is only a part of the game. All the other aspects are just as important. The inspiration you get from seeing live shows and trying to copy certain things you love on record – it's all part of the process.

"And you'd better be very passionate – to the point of insanity, because this is a harder time to get into the business in some ways. Although you could say it's a better time in other ways, to me it seems like it's harder because I had the experience of going through the greatest record industry period of all time back in the 70s and 80s. It was phenomenal."

Al Di Meola's *Across The Universe – The Beatles Vol 2* is out 13 March 2020

© Hernan Romero

SACRED GROUND

Hernan Romero and Al Di Meola recording at Abbey Road studios

Hernan Romero, flamenco guitarist and producer, tells *Guitar* about the studio techniques used to make Al Di Meola's second Beatles covers record, *Across The Universe*...

World-renowned flamenco guitarist Hernan Romero has handled co-production duties on Al Di Meola's records since the 1990s – we called him at his New Jersey studio to learn more about the recording process behind this album.

"With Al Di Meola, it's all about quality," Hernan tells us. "He loves Schoeps mics on both nylon-string and steel-strings, and I think we've used them on the last 10 records. We use matched stereo pairs in an X/Y position. This was different to the Abbey Road sessions for *All Your Life* [engineered by Chris Bolster], where we were using all the ambience and the sound of Studio 3, which is just amazing. This record has more going on in the production, which means once you start adding instrumentation that kind of huge 'room mic' sound just gets lost, so we close-mic'd in a smaller room for punch and detail."

When it came to recording guitars on *Across the Universe – The Beatles Vol 2*, Hernan explains that the simple things were often the most important.

"People often underestimate the importance of good, fresh strings and that can be an issue especially with nylon-strings. You can lose the top end fast, and of course, the problem is that when they're new they go out of tune so we constantly have to be tuning. It's a pain, but the sound is better!

"For the electric guitar amp we used a combination of a Royer ribbon mic and a Shure SM57 which is the classic way to do it. Despite being a ribbon mic, the Royer can cope with a loud amp and everyone knows that the SM57 can take a beating! So yeah, a traditional approach, pretty simple, but it works! No effects in the chain so it's really that classic sound.

"The mics went straight into a pair of Neve preamps, then an analogue board and right into Pro Tools. Now, when we were at Abbey Road for the first record, *All Your Life*, we did experiment by going into a Studer [tape machine] and I tell you, the difference was amazing when you go analogue. You get that fatness around 200hz, it's really rounded and wonderful. Pro Tools is the format that everybody uses and on its own it's very clean, but it lacks the warmth. Once you add the Neve pre-amps, though, you get a fantastic sound."

FOLLOWING THE FABS

When it came to getting a sound that would offer a fitting vibe, however, Al and Hernan found themselves leaning on studio tricks that the Fab Four themselves were so instrumental in popularising.

"From a production point of view, the thing we got most creative with was panning," he explains. "Just like in the original Beatles records, we panned the drums all the way to the left on some tracks, which is unconventional by today's standards and it immediately created a vintage kind of sound. It really worked on this record because the guitars are so intricate we wanted clarity at all times, and we were very picky about that.

"Most importantly, we never lost sight of the fact that this is The Beatles! This is sacred ground! And that inspired us to do the very best we could."

CAMOFLANGE

Thorpy FX

WWW.THORPYFX.COM

The NAMM Show
GAIN

CALIFORNIA SOUL

You've already read about Gibson and Epiphone's vast array of exciting new instruments for 2020 and our deep dive into Taylor's new Builder's Edition Collection begins on p86. Before that, here's the best of the rest of the guitars, amplifiers and effects that debuted in at Winter NAMM in Anaheim. From Custom Shop creations to artist collaborations, innovative tech and affordable workhorses, this year's show was a vibrant celebration of the tools of our trade. Read on for our highlights from the show floor and don't forget to check out the videos on *Guitar.com*

1

2

3

4

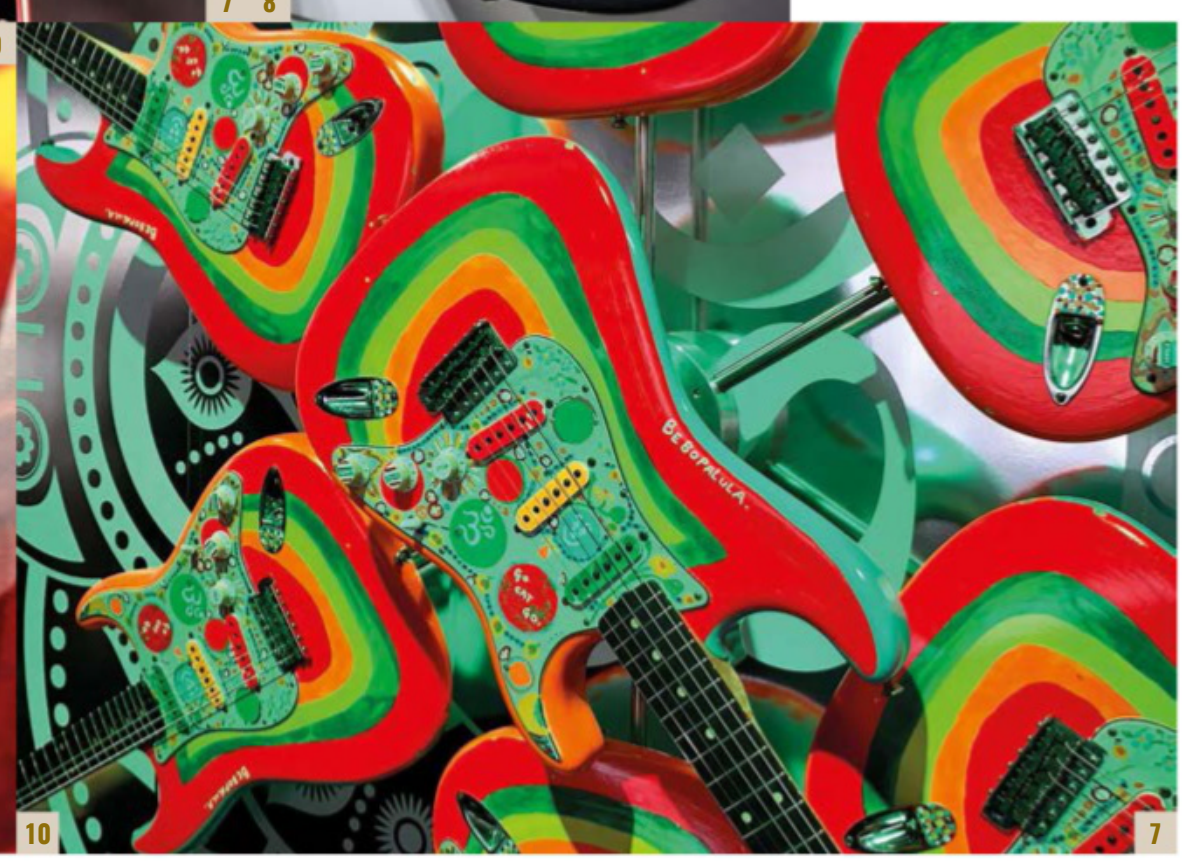
5

6

7 8

9

10



7

1. Dennis Fano's Novo brand goes from strength to strength with the Solus, a killer new single-cut model

2. The PRS Silver Sky is one of the most talked-about guitars in recent years, and the John Mayer model is now available with a maple 'board

3. From the workbench of Fender Master Builder Carlos Lopez comes this Custom Shop Offset Sub Strat Relic in Pink Paisley/Gold Burst

4. Eastman's SB55DC/v sees the brand bring its Antique Varnish aesthetic to a stripped-down solidbody

5. Another Dennis Fano design, the Rivolta Mondata Baritone VII does everything from djent to tic-tac tones

6. The Gretsch Electromatic line is bolstered by this stylish Jet Baritone with Bigsby

7. The Striped Series Frankie from EVH has vibe in spades

8. Another Carlos Lopez Masterbuilt model, this cool Fender Custom Shop Marauder features an onboard delay unit

9. Tom Morello's Soul Power Stratocaster, lovingly recreated by Fender

10. An eye-catching display of Fender Custom Shop George Harrison Rocky Stratocasters

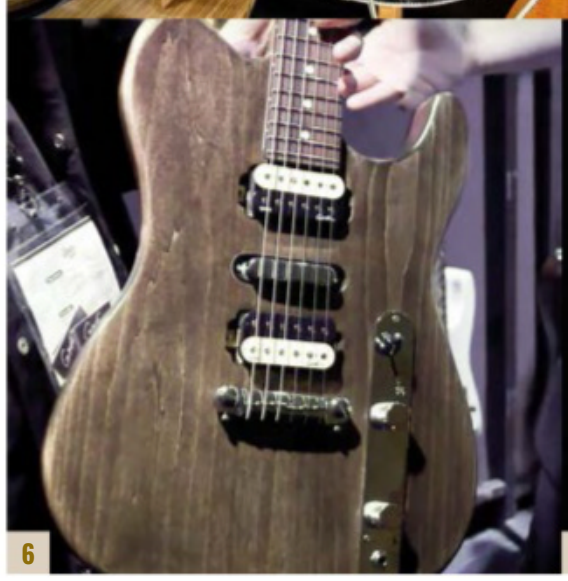
1. The Fender Jazz Stratocaster is an appealing mash-up from the company's Parallel Universe II series

2. Gretsch's Streamliner Junior Jet Club is a bargainous, no-nonsense solidbody

3. Harmony's Comet prototype will be the first semi-hollow instrument to join the relaunched brand's Standard Series

4. Doug Kauer's cool collab with Prisma Guitars yielded this skateboard-inlayed and bound Starliner

5. A hyper-rare vintage Maton Fyrbyrd in faded Pelham Blue loaned to Reverb by the Maton Museum in Australia



6. Godin's Radium model, combining the design philosophies of the company's Radiator and Stadium series

9 10

11 12

7. George Lowden built this thinline version of the GL-10 electric especially for the show

8. Macmull's Heartbreaker NEO is a heartbreaker by both name and nature

9. Yuriy Shishkov's NAMM showpieces are the stuff of legend and the Fabergé Coronation Guitar came with a cool $560,000 price tag

10. Relish Guitars debuted its more affordable Trinity model, complete with pickup swapping capabilities

11. As usual, the Fender Custom Shop's dealer event was packed full of glorious guitars, such as this Super Heavy Relic in Sherwood Green over sunburst

12. Music Man's Sabre features a lightweight okoume body with a 3/8-inch carved maple top

13 & 14. Muse Star Matthew Bellamy was on hand to help launch his new Manson META Series MBM-1 signature model. Interview coming soon!

13 14

1. Fender's American Acoustasonic Telecaster gets a double-cut sibling as the company debuts the Stratocaster version of the innovative hybrid

2 & 3. In a bold new move for the Pennsylvania company, Martin launched the SC-13E – an offset-body electro with a revolutionary cutaway designed to give full access to all 20 frets

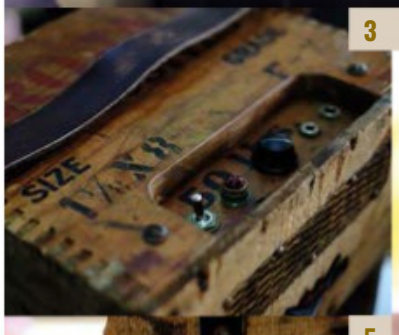
4. Larrivée teamed up with CGP Tommy Emmanuel for the C-03R-TE Custom model

5. Lowden can always be relied upon to bring gorgeous guitars with exotic tonewoods to the party, and this F35 Sinker Redwood was no exception

1. Marshall showed off some killer custom cosmetics at the show, including this reptilian Studio Vintage stack

2. Fender gives a close look the hand-wired internals of its ’64 Custom Princeton Reverb

3. Orange’s Tiny Terror defined the lunchbox amp head genre... will the Terror Stamp do the same for the pedal-board amplifier? At just £149 with full-fat tones, it was one of the stars of the show



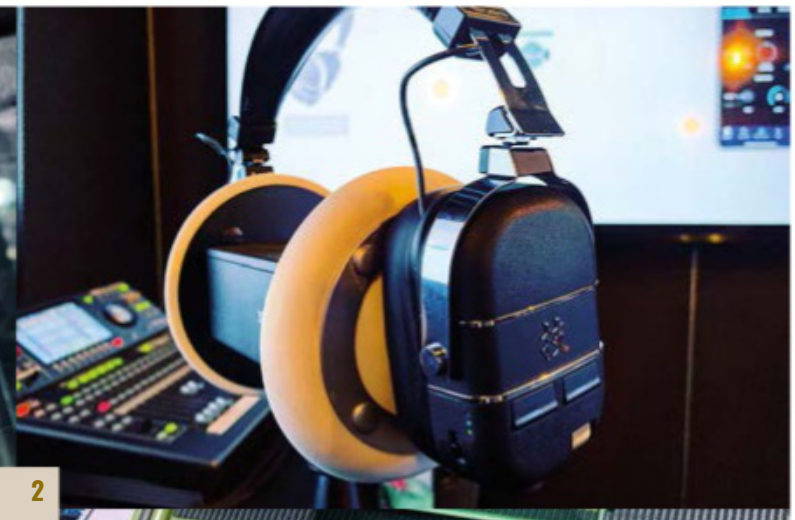
1. Blackstar goes acoustic! Check out the company's new Sonnet line for stage-ready live acoustic tones – Jon Gomm is already a fan!

2. Boss also had one eye on the acoustic market with the Acoustic Singer Live LT combo

3, 4, 5. The Fender Custom Shop showed off this ultra-limited 1925 Dynamite Box amplifier by Master Builder Shawn Greene. Its reclaimed cabinet once contained explosives and now houses a '57 Champ circuit along with six and eight-inch alnico speakers

6. The Suhr Hombre is the brand's tribute to vintage brownface amps

7. The REVV G20 is a high-gain sibling to the D20 and features Two Notes Torpedo tech for direct recording



1 2
3 4

5

6

7

8
10

9

11

1. This Bigsby x Gamechanger Audio collab is still in the prototype stage but generated plenty of interest

2. Boss Waza-Air headphones: sensational 3D guitar tones and wireless connectivity

3. Keeley's Eccos delay/looper features new, high-level DSP that's been four years in the making

4. ThorpyFX debuted reimagined versions of the rare and revered Lovetone Big Cheese and Brown Source

5. The Red Panda Context V2 is a studio-quality reverb from the US boutique boffins

6. Origin's RevivalTREM Bias Tremolo – serious tones and, at £360, a serious price!

7. Walrus Audio's new Mako Series debuts with the D1, a do-it-all, hi-fi stereo delay

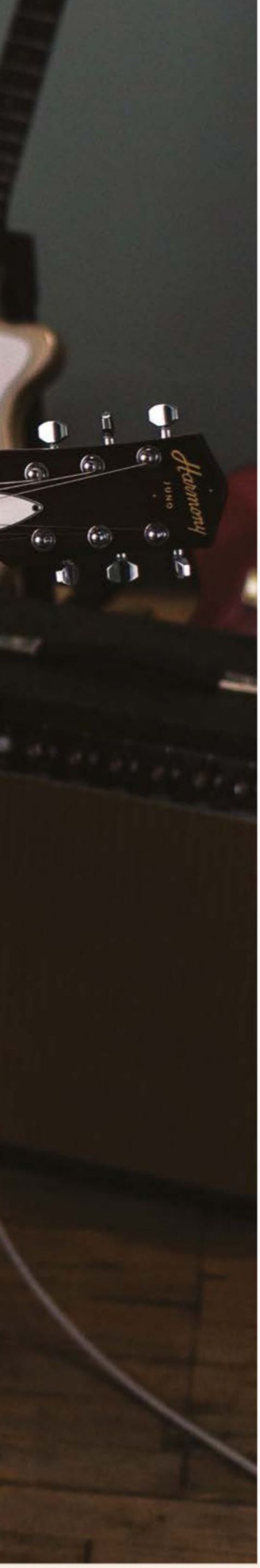
8. The Anasounds Spinner is a quirky twist on the expression pedal concept

9. Beetronics' Fatbee overdrive is a little monster

10. Huge octave fuzz from the Redbeard Honey Badger

11. Fender gets tubular with the MTG Tube Tremolo pedal

J U
N O



Go Anywhere, Play Anything

Make the world your stage with the mighty **Harmony Juno**.

Features:

- Made in USA
- Genuine mahogany body
- Nitrocellulose lacquer finish
- Bone nut
- Custom gold foil P90 pickups
- Custom half bridge with compensated saddles
- Locking tuners
- Comes with free MONO® Stealth Electric Guitar Case Mini

Available in Rose, Champagne and Pearl White

Harmony
— SINCE 1892 —

VINTAGE BENCH TEST

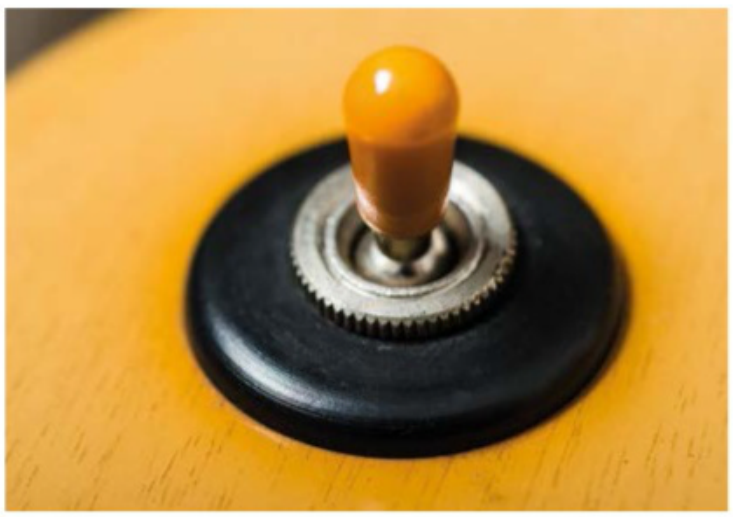
SPECIAL STUFF

WORDS HUW PRICE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Only a year separates these Gibsons, but the sonic and structural changes are significant. Find out what happens when single and double-cut Les Paul Specials from 1958 and '59 go head-to-head…

ABOVE 1959 and 1958 Les Paul Specials – those years weren't *just* about Bursts, you know

RIGHT The '58's pickup selector surround is a rubber washer not a 'poker chip'



If a week is a long time in politics, a year is a long time in the world of vintage guitars. We've said many times that the combination of a slab of Honduran mahogany, old P-90s and a zamak wrapover bridge offers as close to a sure-fire guarantee of great guitar tone as it's possible to get, but although this pair of 1950s Les Paul Specials have that much in common, there are some significant structural differences. How much difference does a year and an additional cutaway make? Let's investigate…

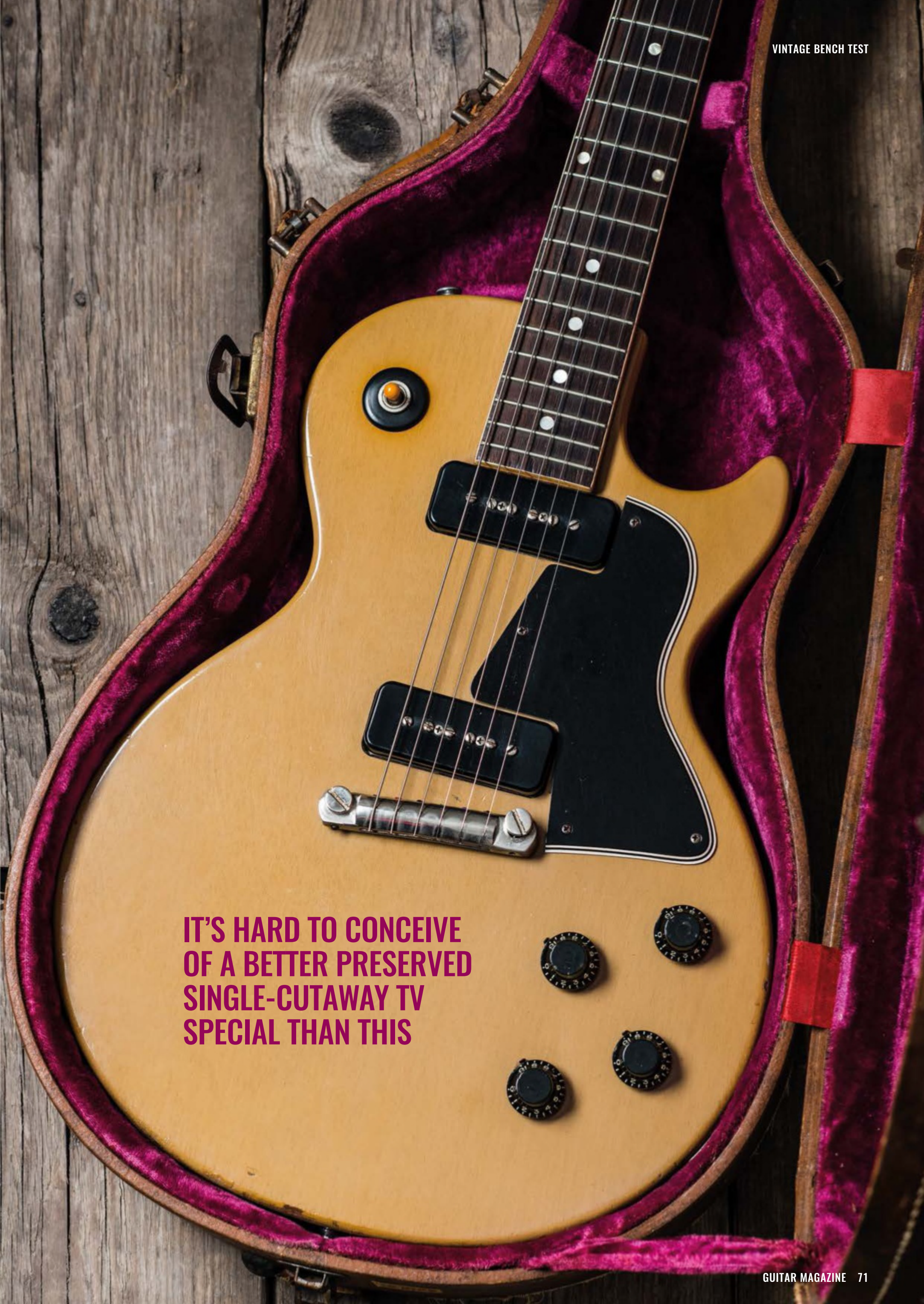
This 1958 TV Special is one of the very last of the single-cutaway models, while the cherry double-cutaway '59 is one of the last to have the Les Paul Special designation. The model lingered on until 1961, but towards the end of 1959, the 'Les Paul Special' screen print was removed from the headstock and the guitar was re-branded the 'Les Paul SG'. The double cutaway superseded the single cutaway in mid-'58 and the differences between them extend beyond the stylistic. Gibson's radical move towards unobstructed upper fret access necessitated a complete redesign of the neck joint – but we'll discuss that in more detail later.

The selector switch also had to be relocated, and after the initial run of double-cutaways, Gibson began giving the bodies a softer edge roll-over. Our double-cutaway example has five serial numbers after the date digit and the rounder body edges, but since it still has the 'Special' logo, it was most likely produced some time during the first half of 1959.

The single-cut TV's most distinguishing feature is the rubber washer around the pickup selector switch where you might expect to see a 'poker chip'. Gibson's rationale for using rubber parts on electric guitars has long been forgotten, but rubber rings often featured on its high-end jazzboxes and were apparently only fitted to single cutaway Les Paul Specials around March 1958.

If Juniors were the 'student' models, Specials must have been seen as a 'postgraduate' stepping stone towards Gibson's higher-end solidbodies. The refinements included a second pickup, fingerboard binding and erm… that's about it. But despite occupying the entry level end of the catalogue, Juniors and Specials were professional quality instruments. Rather than compromise on the pickups and materials, Gibson simply devised a way to build a simpler version of the Les Paul in order to reduce costs.

No doubt taking inspiration from Fender's Broadcaster/Telecaster, Gibson eschewed the carved



IT'S HARD TO CONCEIVE OF A BETTER PRESERVED SINGLE-CUTAWAY TV SPECIAL THAN THIS

KEY FEATURES

1958 GIBSON LES PAUL TV SPECIAL
PRICE £9,995
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid mahogany body and set mahogany neck with bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard
HARDWARE Wrapover bridge, Kluson single line tuners
ELECTRONICS 2x P-90 pickups, 2x volume and tone, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 625mm/24.6”
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 52.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23.5mm at first fret, 25.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36.6mm at nut, 51mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.62kg/7.98lb
FINISH TV Yellow nitrocellulose
CONTACT atbguitars.com

ABOVE The ’58’s electronics and tuners are original here, although its wrapover bridge is likely a replacement

maple top and instead used mahogany bodies that were flat on the front and back. And it was the same lightweight Honduras mahogany that was used for Les Paul Goldtops, Customs and the later Bursts. Mahogany necks were still glued in, and Brazilian rosewood was used for the fingerboards.

It’s hard to conceive of a better preserved single-cutaway TV Special than this example. Besides a bit of buckle rash and a few scrapes around the lower bout, the finish is in remarkable condition and there’s barely any neck wear. Gibson’s TV finish varied over the years, but we’d describe this as Dijon mustard with a hint of olive-green drab. There’s no pale undercoat and you can just about see the grain through the finish.

At the time of writing, the guitar is fitted with a bridge that may not be original. The top is quite sharp, rather than rounded, it’s skewed towards the bass side so the strings run off centre, and the measurements differ slightly from the indisputably original bridge on the ’59. However, we’re assured this guitar will be sold with a genuine vintage bridge.

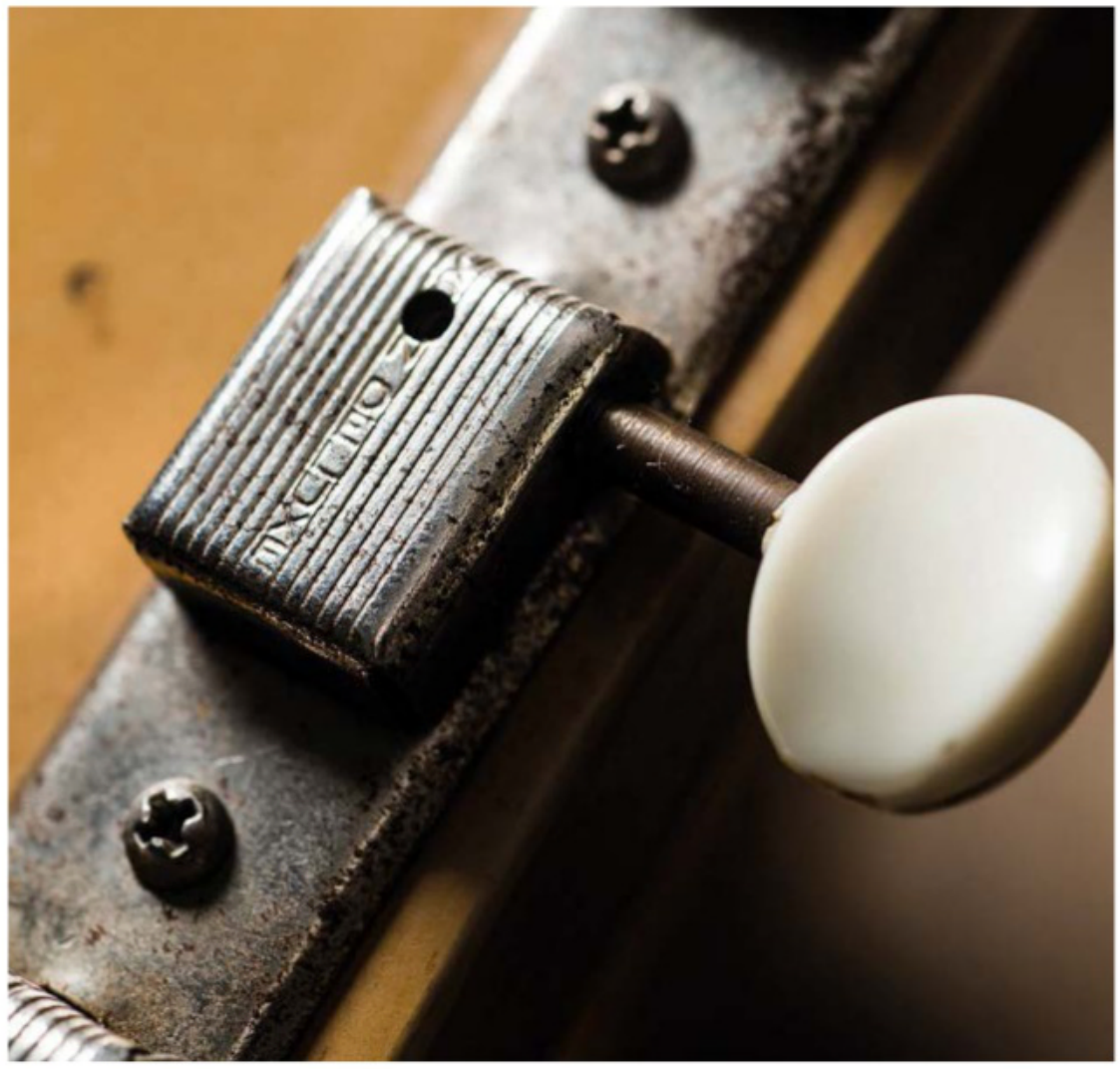
The cherry guitar’s finish is in almost as fine shape. There’s a bit more patina in the form of lacquer checking and neck wear at the headstock end, but the colour remains remarkably unfaded. Both guitars retain their full complement of factory-fitted Centralab potentiometers and oil-filled ‘bumblebee’ capacitors, and the correct three-on-a-plate single line Klusons are the only tuners ever to have been fitted.

IN USE

If you’ve never played a vintage Gibson before, you may feel a little intimidated by the neck depth. But if you persevere, you might find you soon forget the ‘size’ and ease into the sublime playability. Once your brain adjusts, 1950s Gibsons have an ‘old slippers’ level of comfort and familiarity.

We’ve become quite accustomed to the 50s Gibson feel over the last few years, and would no longer describe these necks as being especially fat. As for the ‘baseball bat’ comparison, we can only assume it was devised by people who had never spent much time with guitars such as these, or were simply oblivious to the finesse and subtlety of Gibson’s 50s profiles.

Both guitars feel fantastic in the hand and there’s little to choose between them. The single-cutaway’s neck is a fraction deeper, while the double-cutaway’s depth remains slightly more consistent along its length – but in essence, they’re pretty much the same.



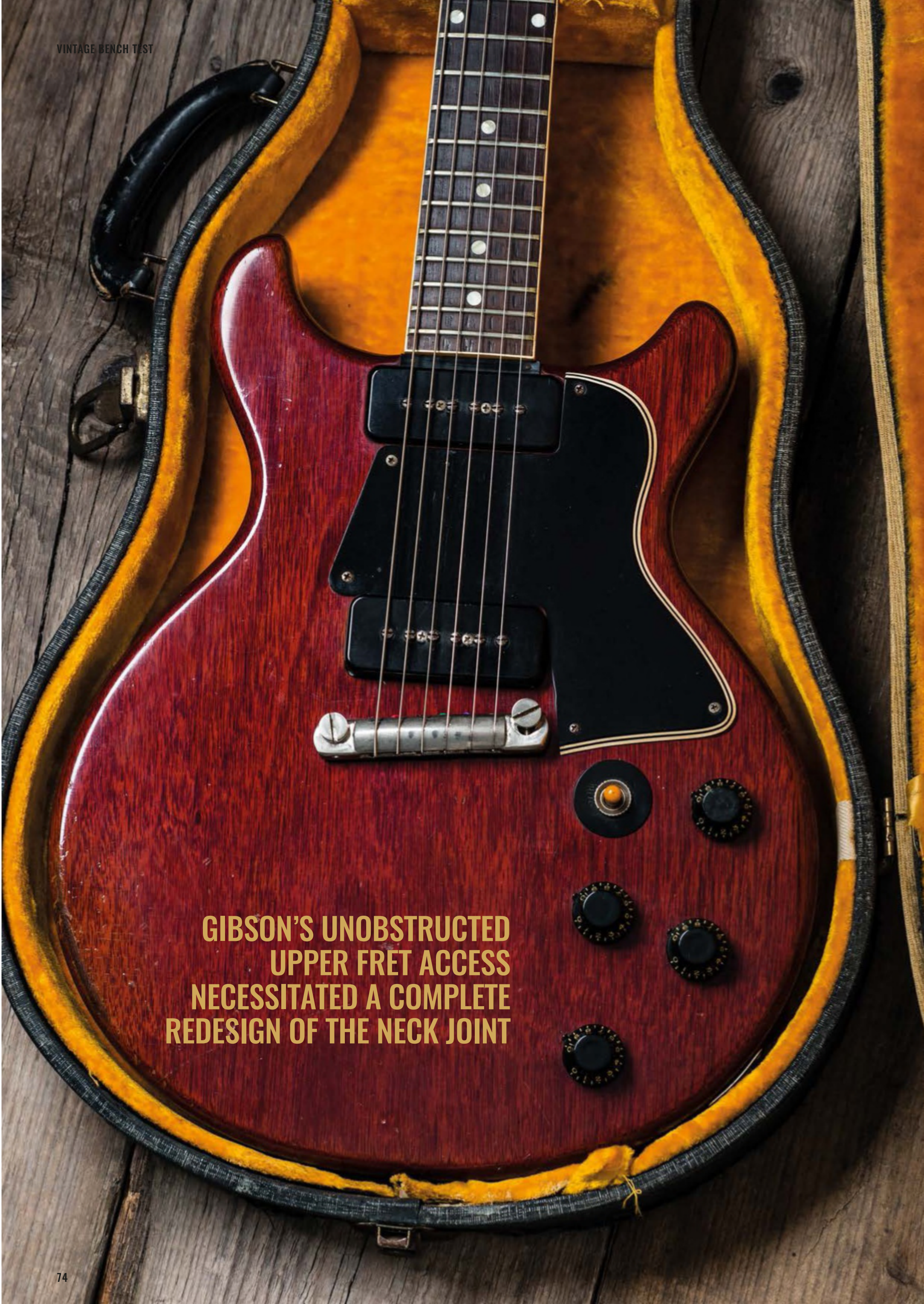
We find the single-cutaway balances in the lap a little better, but again it's barely noticeable, and the double-cutaway has none of the neck heaviness associated with SGs. It does have a bit of neck whip, so Townshend/Frisell-style vibrato is on the cards, but the whole structure feels more solid and stable than a typical SG.

Both guitars still have their factory fitted frets, and here there is more of a distinction. The fretwire Gibson was using in 1958 was still 1.85mm (0.073") wide, but by 1959 the wire had widened to 2.56mm (0.1"). Since the double-cutaway has been so lightly played, the frets retain their original height of 0.83mm (0.032").

The TV Yellow single-cutaway's frets are almost uniformly flat on top, and whether that's down to playwear or fret levelling is open to question. The upshot is that the wider frets are actually lower in height at 0.75mm (0.03"). We find the narrower frets easier to play, but again we're splitting hairs. In addition, the red double-cutaway guitar has a replaced nut, but it appears to be vintage correct nylon.

Some might argue that having just two guitars to compare isn't much of a sample group from which to

ABOVE The TV Special's pickups sound exactly like the alnico III P-90s in our '54 Goldtop



GIBSON'S UNOBSTRUCTED UPPER FRET ACCESS NECESSITATED A COMPLETE REDESIGN OF THE NECK JOINT

draw definitive conclusions regarding tonal qualities of single and double-cutaway Les Paul Specials. Nevertheless, the unplugged characteristics of these guitars are so distinct, we're confident that our observations are broadly applicable.

Both guitars weigh about the same, and the materials are identical, yet the double-cutaway is noticeably brighter and louder. It's comparable to a really nice early SG Special, but we hear a tad more heft in the low mids as well as a more complex and shinier treble response. There's also a pleasing solidity and clarity to the tone that combines woodiness with a gnarly bite.

All these seductive sonics incline us towards the double-cutaway at first, but our viewpoint becomes more nuanced as the single-cutaway's subtle charms gradually reveal themselves.

It may be less bright and quick to respond, but we soon realise that the oft-cited correlation between single cutaways and superior sustain could be a fair assessment. Listening carefully to the ADSR (attack, decay, sustain and release) curve, the double-cut has a very fast attack that holds its level for a second or so. It then drops off quite suddenly to sustain well – albeit at a slightly lower level. In contrast, the single-cutaway holds its peak level longer, with the fade to silence occurring in a more even and gradual way – over quite some time. In other words, the decay phase is largely absent from its ADSR curve.

It's a far warmer and mellower tone that is more in keeping with our expectations of a 1950s Gibson

TOP This '59 has an indisputably original bridge

ABOVE LEFT The plastic 'poker chip' selector surround

ABOVE The '59 is one of the last to have the Les Paul Special designation

ABOVE The 1959 model's P-90s create an impression of greater loudness by emphasising the upper midrange

solidbody, and not dissimilar to a 1954 Goldtop we have on hand to compare. However, the single cutaway sounds brighter and louder than the Goldtop – probably because there's no maple cap.

Time to amp up, and it's immediately apparent that the pickups both reflect and emphasise the characteristics we hear in the unplugged tones. Bear in mind that only a year or so separates these guitars, but the pickups have vastly different tonal qualities.

Without sending the pickups off for metallurgical analysis, it's impossible to provide a definitive explanation. It's widely accepted that P-90s were made with alnico III magnets until 'around' 1957, after which Gibson supposedly switched to alnico V. Then again, pickup restorers conclude that the grade of alnico Gibson used was often dictated by availability – manufacturing dates often indicate a range of possibilities rather than absolute certainties.

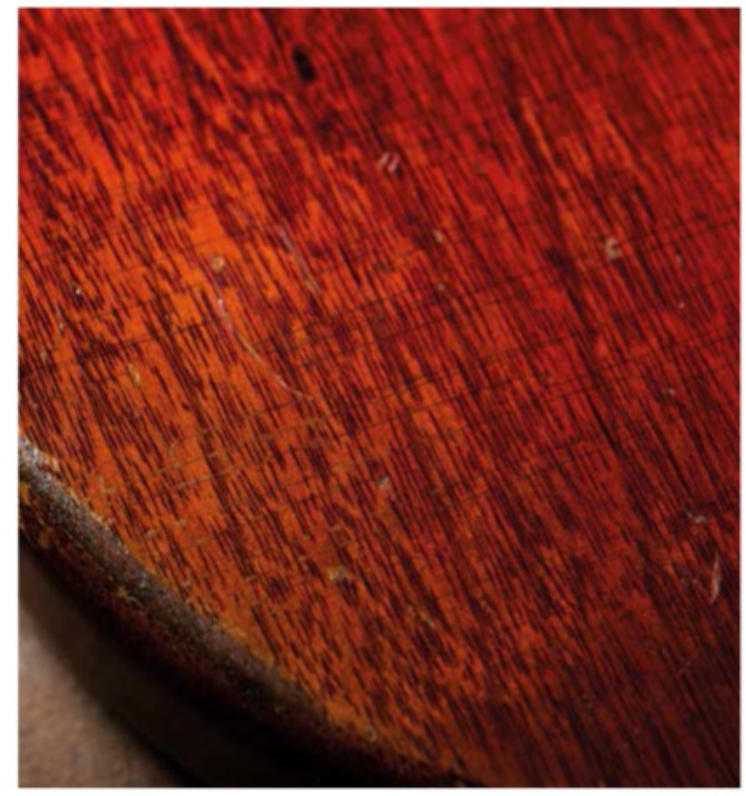
What's certain is that the single-cutaway's P-90s sound exactly like the alnico III P-90s in our '54 Goldtop and '56 ES-225. They're ultra transparent, without sounding especially bright, and they have a smoothness and fluidity that we love. The bridge has a snarly quack, providing countrified cleans that ease into raunchier rock tones with added overdrive.

KEY FEATURES

1959 GIBSON LES PAUL SPECIAL
PRICE £8,495
DESCRIPTION Solidbody electric guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Solid mahogany body and set mahogany neck with bound Brazilian rosewood fingerboard
HARDWARE Wrapover bridge, Kluson single line tuners
ELECTRICS 2x P-90 pickups, 2x volume and tone, 3-way pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 625mm/24.6"
NECK WIDTH 43.2mm at nut, 52.8mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 23mm at first fret, 24.6mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 37mm at nut, 50.4mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.25kg/7.17lb
FINISH Cherry nitrocellulose
CONTACT atbguitars.com

Over at the neck, the tone has rounded quality that is old-school jazz to a tee when played clean, and becomes almost vocally expressive through a cranked amp. The middle position's phasey mid-scoop and slightly compressed transient attack is a third tonal option that is entirely distinct from the other two.

Besides the possibility of different magnets, we should also factor in the proximity of the pickups to the strings. There's quite a gap on the single-cutaway guitar, but barely any on the red '59. Although there is some scope for adjustment with 'soapbar' P-90s, the main reason is the redesigned neck joint.



The double-cutaway instrument's fingerboard terminates at the point where the neck joins the body and the neck extends beyond the neck pickup rout by almost 30mm. In order to keep the neck tenon flush with the top, Gibson had to set the neck deeper into the body. This requires the bridge to be set lower too, for a viable playing action.

Furthermore, Gibson must have been keen to avoid compromising structural stability by routing too deep into the tenon to accommodate the neck pickup. As a result, it sits about 5mm closer to the strings by default, and the bridge pickup is set similarly to maintain balance.

Gibson pickups of the 1950s are extremely sensitive to height adjustment and jacking P-90s up like this brings out their brighter and more aggressive qualities. That's very much the case with this double-cut Special.

The pickups are more powerful, but in actuality they probably don't produce significantly more output than the 1958 model's units. We suspect the 1959 P-90s create an impression of greater loudness by emphasising the upper midrange frequencies – much like PAFs with their covers removed.

There's no denying that the double-cutaway guitar is a far wilder and hairier ride, but the older P-90s counter with a more even frequency response. With less push in the upper mids, the single-cutaway's tone has a smoother and creamier quality that, to our ears, sounds more musical. For reference, the bridge and neck readings of the single and double-cutaway models are 8.28k/8.21k and 8.77k/8.41k respectively.

Of the eight 1950s P-90s in the room at the time of writing, the 1959 Special's bridge pickup displays the least microphony. Consequently, the neck pickup it's paired with actually sounds clearer and has a more extended treble response. Where the 1958 LP's bridge pickup has a wiry vintage quack, the double-cut's has more of a throaty bark, but somewhat less complexity, chime and tonal depth.

On the plus side, it's less susceptible to high gain squeal and provides a consummate rock tone. The double-cutaway's tone is also far punchier, more up front and has tighter lows. It's the Special you need for chiming, cutting and crunching through a mix, and with brightness to spare, there's a bit more scope for working the controls.

Either of these Specials would be a dream guitar to own, but which one is the best? The answer depends on your playing style, sonic tastes, aesthetic preferences and how the guitars are being used.

Taken in isolation, the single-cut 1958 model is sweeter sounding and more inspiring to play. We also feel it might be the superior studio guitar. But out there in the real world of rehearsals, and gigging, with the perpetual struggle to hear oneself properly, we suspect the double-cut '59 could win out.

TOP LEFT Both guitars retain their factory-fitted Centralab potentiometers and oil-filled 'bumblebee' capacitors

ABOVE The '59 has wider, fatter fretwire

AMPLIFIER FAQ

In the latest instalment of his amp advice column, Rift's Chris Fantana turns his attention to speaker efficiency. Pardon?

Have a burning question about your amp, or worse still, a burning amp? Email us at editors@guitar.com

ABOVE These Warehouse speakers have very different efficiency ratings, with the Black & Blue Alnico delivering a loud 99.5dB and the G12Q a more reserved 95.9dB

Hi Chris, I'm looking to upgrade the speaker in my 2012 Hot Rod Deluxe. I understand about wattages and impedance, but keep reading about speaker efficiency as a factor. Can you explain what that means?
JAMIE, NORTHAMPTON

Great question, Jamie. Speaker manufacturers usually list how efficient their speakers are at converting electrical energy into actual sound. This measurement is called SPL – sound pressure level – and is shown in decibels. The higher the number, the louder the speaker is.

In times past, there wasn't an industry-standard method for measuring the efficiency of a speaker so each manufacturer would have its own, resulting in often spurious numbers often aimed at beating the nearest competitor. These days, however, there is a generally accepted method of testing and stating the efficiency of a speaker, and it's quite simple.

Situated inside an anechoic chamber – a room designed to stop sound reflections – the speaker under test will be fitted into a baffle and a microphone will be placed exactly one metre away from the cone, pointing directly at it. Then a one-watt, 1kHz signal is played through the speaker and the resulting dB reading is taken.

Some manufacturers such as Eminence take this a step further, and play tones at various frequencies ranging from 20Hz to 20kHz. Readings are taken across the board and the average supposedly gives a 'real world' representation of how loud the speaker is.

Let's look at two classic examples from Celestion, the G12M Greenback and the Blue. The Greenback is listed as having an SPL rating of 97dB, whereas the Blue is 3dB higher at 100dB. But what does that actually mean? A decibel is a logarithmic unit used to measure sound levels. On the decibel scale, the smallest audible sound (near total silence) is 0dB. A sound 10 times more powerful is 10dB. A sound 100 times more powerful than near total silence is 20dB. A sound 1,000 times more powerful than near total silence is 30dB.

Without wanting to get too technical and mathematical, an increase of 3dB gives the impression of twice the input power. To put it another way, to make the Greenback produce the same volume as the Blue, you would have to drive it with a two-watt signal, rather than one watt. Essentially, the Blue feels like it's twice as loud as the Greenback, given the same input signal.

So we've got our readings, now what? Well, I don't know about you, but measuring a speaker with just a one-watt signal seems a little irrelevant to the average guitarist playing their 30-watt amp at the Red Lion on a Saturday night. I'd like to know what the SPLs are at 18-, 30-, 50- and 100-watts – the common output ratings for most guitar amplifiers. Granted, the one-watt numbers allow *some* comparison, but not enough to truly educate a buyer on what might or might not work for them.

So where does this leave us? Lost and confused, as usual! I jest, of course – there's usually a way to work these things out. The Celestion G12P-80 speaker in your Fender Hot Rod Deluxe is rated at 98dB, so if you're looking for more headroom I'd look for a speaker that's rated at 100dB or higher, such as the WGS G12C. It's proven to be a popular upgrade for the HRD, with enough power handling to boot.

Despite my grievances with the shortcomings of SPL tests, the stated one-watt readings given by the manufacturers *usually* track the same at higher wattages, although not in every case. You can then use those numbers as a simple guide to help your choice of a new speaker, if not as an absolute. Enjoy your new speaker, whatever it may be. G

Visit riftamps.com to find out more about Rift's range of British-built, handwired valve amplifiers

PURE GRETSCH

ELECTROMATIC®

1939

G5420T
ELECTROMATIC HOLLOW BODY
CANDY APPLE RED

SOUND OF HONOR

GRETSCH®

GRETSCHGUITARS.COM/ELECTROMATIC-HB

©2019 Fender Musical Instruments Corporation. Bigsby® is a registered trademark of FMIC, Gretsch® is a registered trademark of Fred W Gretsch Enterprises, Ltd. and used herein under license. All rights reserved.

The GFI System team with Henry Widjaja centre

INDUSTRY INSIDER

GFI SYSTEM

INTERVIEW TERENCE STANLEY

Henry Widjaja, the man behind one of Asia's most interesting boutique pedal makers, tells us how the brand from Indonesia got its start…

The boutique pedal scene in Jakarta, Indonesia may not be massive – in fact, there are only a couple of players in the game – but that did not deter Henry Widjaja from pursuing his passion. 10 years ago, the former university lecturer quit his day job and went all in on a new company called GFI System, a solo boutique effects pedal venture.

Countless spools of solder later, Widjaja's operation has made multiple NAMM pilgrimages, and now has a full roster of well-loved stompboxes. GFI System kicked things off with a humble Tube Screamer clone, but is now well-known for its spectacular DSP-based effects units.

We recently sat down with Widjaja and asked how GFI System made it to the big league, and what the pedal industry in Indonesia is like…

How did you get into guitar in the first place?

"I started playing guitar in high school. I started with classical music, and then after a while formed a band and started playing rock. That's when I got into electric guitars and pedals."

Tell us the story behind how you got started tinkering with effects pedals…

"When I was in college, I was really into guitar. I was not much of a *player*, but I really had a deep interest in the guitar technology and audio engineering in general. I had a soft spot for pedals in particular. I thought they were wonderful little devices. So, I collected a bunch of them, opened them up, modified the circuitry, and put them back together again. And at the time, I envisioned myself starting a company, designing and building products on my own.

When did that crystalise into what would become GFI System?

"It was not until 2010 that I finally decided to make it a reality. Before that, I was teaching at a university. After a couple of years at that job, I decided it was really not for me [laughs]. Then in early 2016, my ex-roommate, Jonas, and his brother, Jesse, joined GFI System to help me with the marketing and business side of things, while I focused on the research and development."

Did your academic background help you with your new path at all?

"Well, I studied electrical engineering at Boston University, specialising in signal processing. Soon after, I began applying what I learned to my music hobby as well. This includes as mentioned, opening pedals up and tinkering with them."

Weren't you afraid of breaking your pedals? They must've been difficult to come by as a student.

"Actually, I think I broke a lot of them! [laughs] But it's the price of experimenting with effects."

Did you manage to fix them afterwards at least?

"Oh yes! Actually, what I did most of the time when I first started this company. Friends and customers would bring pedals to me to get them fixed or modified…"

When did you realise this 'hobby' was something you could do professionally?

"In 2010, I quit my teaching job and tried to find opportunities in the city. I decided

I was going to build pedals, and from there it was pretty much make or break. Within a couple of years I realised that GFI's pedals were selling and I wouldn't be able to go it alone for much longer. I eventually came to understand that it would take a lot of energy to handle marketing and all of that, so that's when I got Jonas to join me."

Tell us how you started designing GFI's pedals.

"My first pedal, like many other brands, was an overdrive pedal. Mine was called the Bluescaster – based on an Ibanez TS9 Tube Screamer, but I put my own spin on it. I added a booster in it, so it's actually two pedals in one – it has an overdrive side, and then a booster side. And they can both operate independently. So, you turn off the overdrive and still have the booster for a clean boost effect."

So what was the reception when you first put out that pedal?

"To be honest, it was actually slow because I didn't have any recognition at the time. Nobody knew the brand, so I just put it online and see if anyone was interested. Some people bought it though, and they liked it."

So how did its popularity pick up?

"It actually didn't! [laughs] But soon after that I began developing DSP-based effects. I started creating reverb, delay and modulation pedals. And *those* pedals got pretty popular. My first reverb pedal was called the Specular Reverb. It has three sounds: regular reverb, reverb with doppler, and reverb with atmosphere. It became quite popular, and I developed the second version with an improved circuit.

"It's the one pedal that really encouraged me to pursue this passion further. It's one of my all-time bestsellers."

So how did that idea come along?

"The reverb pedal is one effect that's not possible to be created in analogue technology. It has to be done with digital technology. So it's one of the first things that I looked at when I took the deep dive into digital technology. It really intrigued me because it's also one of the most difficult effects to get right."

What's the boutique pedal scene in Jakarta like?

"There are a few pedal builders in Jakarta, but I'm not sure how many of them are really serious about it. By that, I mean making it their full-time business. Fmpedals, run by Mr Ivan, is another popular builder. But when I started doing this, there was only one other guy, that I know of, who was building boutique pedals in a workshop. KS Tone workshop, it was called. It's no longer around, I don't think."

What do you think about the current state of the boutique pedal market?

"It's definitely a much bigger scene than when I first started. I think that's because it's not too hard to get into the business now. Maybe it's harder to maintain it, what with the competition and all. But there are definitely many more players in the boutique market now. Unfortunately, that also means prices have been going up."

What's your proudest moment as a builder to date?

"I think my proudest moment was when I finally managed to get to NAMM. That was in 2016. I went to Anaheim not expecting much because I was largely unknown at the time. But the reception ended up being pretty good, and a lot of people showed interest in the pedals. So that was pretty exciting."

What is the biggest challenge you've faced in building your pedals?

"The biggest challenge was getting raw materials. Actually, the challenge is ongoing. I have to import 98 per cent of the materials I use, and they come from Taiwan, China and the United States.

"Another challenge I faced was the lack of support for the creative industry in Indonesia. For example, when I was trying to find a workshop that could manufacture an enclosure for the pedals, none of them could do it here. Most of the workshops here are outfitted for heavy industry. So I needed to outsource that part of the business to Taiwan."

When you look ahead, what are the opportunities and challenges you see for GFI in 2020?

"The biggest challenge is probably staying ahead of the competition, because in the DSP scene everyone is really innovative. Companies are constantly coming up with new stuff, so I need to keep abreast of the latest developments and keep innovating."

Any particular plans you are working on?

"For 2020, I'm planning to design more advanced and versatile models of the pedals we currently offer – especially the Cabzeus, Specular Reverb and Clockwork Delay. I've got a lot of requests for those already, actually."

For more information visit gfisystem.com

SHOP TALK

JOE KNAGGS
KNAGGS GUITARS

WORDS DAVE HUNTER

After 25 years as production manager and designer with one of the most successful guitar brands of the modern era, Joe Knaggs decided to take his vision directly to the people...

Few guitar makers have jumped straight into the boutique market after such extensive experience with a major manufacturer so confidently as Joe Knaggs, or have received such immediate kudos for having done so. After 25 years with Paul Reed Smith Guitars – the majority of them as production manager – Knaggs departed the legendary Maryland-based company in 2009 to set up his own operation, alongside former PRS colleague Peter Wolf, who is now VP of global sales and marketing at Knaggs Guitars.

Stepping out from under an umbrella as broad as PRS's can't have been easy, but the flipside of that transition carries the vast experience in both guitar-making and customer relations – including a significant network of star artists – that Knaggs and Wolf took with them in doing so. And if it's never easy launching a new business in the competitive high-end guitar market, Knaggs certainly made it look like a natural and even inevitable move. Stylistically distinctive and original, display-case-worthy yet eminently playable, Knaggs guitars have ably cut their own path these 10 years into the game, and moved surprisingly easily out from under what might have seemed a long shadow.

12 STRINGS AND THE TRUTH

Knaggs was born in 1962 in Washington, DC, and grew up 10 miles northeast in Bowie, Maryland – just down the street, as it happens, from an older boy named Paul Smith. Like so many in this business, he became fascinated with the guitar at a young age, and obsessive soon after. "The first music I remember was *Good Vibrations* by The Beach Boys," Knaggs recalls. "My sister had the 45, along with *Hey Jude*. I was five years old. Then I heard an Eagles song while I was playing pool with my long-time buddy Marc Izzi. I heard a 12-string guitar; that fascinated me, and somehow that sound got me curious about the guitar. I believe I was about nine or 10 years old."

Before entering the industry himself, Knaggs developed a penchant for finishing in particular, a skill that would get him in the door just months after the official launch of PRS Guitars on West Street in Annapolis, Maryland.

"I learned a lot about chemicals, coatings, and wood treatment before I started," says Knaggs. "I had finished a guitar for side money about a year before Paul started PRS Guitars. I brought it to Paul to see if they needed some side finishing, but Bud Davis was doing his finishing at that time. About a year later I received a call asking me to come over and help them with the finishing work. They were struggling to get guitars through the system. So, I started in October 1985 by running the finishing department and quickly went on to run the factory as production manager."

EXPRESSING HIMSELF

As his oversight of PRS production gradually incorporated more and more creative work, Knaggs realised he had something significant to express in the guitar world himself… even if he wasn't quite sure what it was just yet. As he honed his initial ideas to a sharper edge, though, the effort found him originating some of the company's more distinctive latter-day models in the process.

"I received my employee guitar and did not like it," he recalls. "Then I made a semi-hollow version and it was okay, but still did not tickle my fancy. I was a huge George Benson fan and wanted a guitar like he played, so I went to Paul and said I wanted to make an archtop guitar. He said 'go for it,' thinking I was going to make a big archtop, but I took the existing PRS body shape and hollowed it out like an archtop, leaving the bridge block in for the stoptail bridge. It was a cool instrument that you could crank up without feedback, and we quickly developed a thinner version called the 'Hollowbody.'

"The drawing and designing seemed to come naturally to me – I was an artist growing up – so I went on to design the SC, Mira, Starla, Gary Grainger Bass, Mandolin, and SC-J, along with tons of inlay designs and so forth for Private Stock. I felt the same way when developing the current Knaggs line of guitars."

The decision to leave PRS didn't come easily to Joe Knaggs, and for several years he still envisioned his own designs taking root via the company's creations.

"I had drawn and built some prototypes of guitars that I personally would want to play," he says, "and it was important to get them out there. We tried to bring them into PRS, but it did not work out, so after 10 years of contemplating the decision it was time to go and try it. I took a walk with my lovely wife and said, 'What do you think?' She said, 'You will never know 'til you try!'

"At the same time, PRS was also heading in a different direction where we were having to put together PowerPoint presentations and shit like that. That was not for me. I wanted to make guitars."

BEAUTIFUL BY DESIGN

Even a cursory glance at a handful of Knaggs models will tell you this maker is doing things very much

“I HAVE NO INTEREST IN COPYING ANOTHER GUITAR. THAT DOES NOTHING FOR ME”

his own way, yet without any rebellious or radical departure from the traditional form. A hint at some elements gleaned from the PRS camp might be in evidence here and there, which is understandable, yet the overall impression is one of an elegant and original house aesthetic, which puts equal weight on the appeal of unique visuals and the veracity of hardware design.

Elements of the former include exotic woods, internal top purfling, and two-coloured tops, while the latter is perhaps best exhibited in the Knaggs Influence 2-in-1 bridge and string holder (kind of a one-piece tune-o-matic and stoptail combined), or the Chesapeake vibrato on his S-inspired models. Put it all together, and it makes for utterly distinctive branding. For all the originality, though, Knaggs’s own design philosophy sounds very down-to-earth.

“I design what I think looks, feels, plays and most importantly sounds good,” he says. “I have no interest in copying another guitar. That does nothing for me. While battling cancer I was lying in bed thinking to myself, ‘When you walk into a music store there are thousands of guitars. They all kind of look the same unless they are a freak shape.’ That is when I came up with the one- and two-purf thing; I wanted our guitars to stand out, but in a nice, artistic way. I wanted to be able to stain the maple top with two different colours and have it not bleed together.”

Regarding the eminently recognisable shapes of the guitars themselves, Knaggs tells us, “When I drew the first shape that was a predecessor to the existing Severn and Choptank, I started with the thought of a classic guitar that people recognise and know and

went from there. I try to make sure the shapes flow and work with each other. Most really great designs are based around feminine-shaped curves. Somehow, when I draw the shapes for Knaggs they come out looking like a 'Knaggs' shape.

"I recently drew the pickguard for our new Kenai J – [Knaggs builder] Lukas Fronzoli took one look at it and said, 'It looks like a *Knaggs* pickguard!' A good shape is a good shape, and anyone can see that. Somehow it instantly makes them feel good. We have a lot of people that do not play guitar say, 'That is really beautiful, I want to buy one just to look at it!' That is a really nice compliment. But again, I want the instrument to look, feel, play, and most important, *sound* good.

GOOD BONES

Even before such skin-deep considerations come into play, though, this is a maker that strives to get the chassis right first and foremost, and to inject optimal resonance and musicality into the wood structure that forms the foundation of any of his instruments.

"Regarding that effort," Knaggs relates, "I can start by saying I want the guitar to ring and sustain. If the guitar is ringing and sustaining then, then the ability for the energy first created by the plucking of the string is not being hampered in its travel through the instrument. I felt the same way about developing the bridge designs, which are things that I did not see in the market. The designs were geared towards creating more harmonics and sustain in the instrument. I played a '61 Strat when I played seriously, and I wanted to improve on that type of guitar."

Among the plethora of details that translate the craft into an art form, Knaggs says he gives the most attention of all to neck design and construction.

"The biggest thing is how you make your necks," he declares. "The way we make our necks adds to the sustain and ring of the instrument. You want the truss-rod to have to do as little as possible to get the neck back to straight, which will keep the neck relaxed. The way we make our necks optimises that sustain and ring that I'm talking about, because the neck is as relaxed as possible before the truss-rod is used. The more relaxed the guitar is, rather than being forced into a position, the better it will ring."

NAME DROPPING

Given PRS's extensive roster of name artists, Knaggs has long appreciated the benefit of star endorsements. Throughout his 10 years with Knaggs Guitars, close associations with such artists has only helped him improve his product, and keep the mission on course.

"During the time with PRS I worked with Mark Tremonti, John McLaughlin, John Scofield, Carlos Santana – though not directly – and John Fogerty, who was my favourite guy I worked with, to name just a few," he says. "Currently I talk with Steve Stevens quite a bit, and we work with Eric Steckel, Larry Mitchell, and Tyler Tomlinson, among others. They are all good friends as well. I also deal with local guys that are great players, like Mike McHenry and Jeff Washington. Peter Wolf, my partner in crime, is also constantly talking with these guys and he handles artist relations, all social media, along with other marketing, sales and gobs of other stuff."

Alongside himself and Wolf, Knaggs Guitars boasts 11 employees, all of whom are valued in the effort.

"Just like at PRS," Knaggs concludes, "I like accomplishing things as a team. I was a quarterback in [American] football, and to win a game with the team was always the best thing I experienced. Same with making guitars. It's not that fun to toast by yourself. The guys I work with are really talented, great guys. We laugh every day, and put out the best product we can. That is our goal." G

More information from knaggsguitars.com

PREVIOUS PAGES Exotic woods are part of the Knaggs aesthetic, as on this Kenai model

LEFT Joe Knaggs bringing his finishing expertise into play

ABOVE A double-cut Sheyenne with Knaggs Influence 2-in-1 bridge

For Andy Powers, there are two fundamental areas in which you can improve a guitar: *how it sounds, and how it feels*. Taylor's Builder's Edition Collection sees his grandest designs take flight, and with four new models unveiled for 2020, we head to Southern California to find out more…

DIRECTOR'S

CUT

WORDS CHRIS VINNICOMBE
PHOTOGRAPHY ELEANOR JANE

Andy Powers has certainly come a long way since, at the age of just 15, he ran into Bob Taylor at a Harvey Reid concert and showed Bob a ukulele he'd built. Impressed with the quality of the workmanship, Taylor famously told the teenager, "If you ever need a job come look me up."

A couple of decades later, Andy was recruited by Bob to lead guitar design for Taylor Guitars, freeing up the company's co-founder to spend more time on forestry and sustainability projects in Cameroon and Hawaii. If it all seems fated already, what if we told you that Andy's middle-name is Taylor? True story…

Powers' recent achievements at Taylor include reinventing the internal architecture of the flat-top acoustic, introducing an elegant new round-shouldered dreadnought into the catalogue in the shape of the vintage-flavoured Grand Pacific, designing the most in-tune 12-string acoustic we've ever heard and much more besides. And 2019 also saw Andy join founders Kurt Listug and Bob Taylor as the company's third partner.

Two years after we came here to play instruments equipped with V-Class bracing for the first time, we're back at the Powers homestead in Carlsbad, 40-something miles north of Taylor's El Cajon headquarters. Renovated by Andy and his carpenter/musician father, the property was once the site of a flower farm and is now part of a sleepy coastal suburb. The barn adjacent to the family home contains an impressively orderly workshop, and it's here where much of the early prototyping and experimentation happens.

Part of what makes Powers unique isn't just his ability to translate the drawings in his notebook into fully realised instruments – it's the scalability of his designs, his ability to work with Taylor's engineering team in devising methods and even new tooling in order to produce them in significant numbers, and the way in which his ideas create a platform for further innovation.

Take V-Class bracing as a case in point. Sure, the musical possibilities of a flat-top acoustic guitar that's in tune all over the neck are significantly expanded, and that's impressive in its own right. Likewise the enhanced projection and sustain offered by Powers' longitudinal bracing pattern. But the concept also allows him to reimagine what's possible within Taylor's acoustic guitar family.

BUILDING BLOCKS

Taylor describes the Builder's Edition Collection as being Andy's 'director's cut' – the sweet spot

"IS IT FUN TO PLAY OR NOT FUN TO PLAY? THAT'S WHAT IT COMES DOWN TO, RIGHT?"

where innovation, player comfort and the sonic advantages of the V-Class idea coalesce, without the usual constraints imposed on a guitar-maker when designing a production line instrument. Although there's no doubting the premium status of these instruments, there's also a sense of clarity that's the result of the designer's intentions being undiluted.

"The Builder's Edition idea was a way to make sense of wanting to build stuff that was just outside of our normal," Powers explains. "What do you do when you have a guitar that doesn't fit *anything* else you are doing? It's not really the same wood, not really the same internals, not really the same anything. But you still wanna make it because it's fun to play."

Despite his deep understanding of the anatomy and science of musical instruments, fun and approachability are always at the forefront of Powers' mind. "More than anything that's my criteria," he insists. "Whether or not a guitar is good. Is it fun to play or not fun to play? That's what it comes down to, right?

"There are some guitars, you pick it up and go, there's no reason why this should sound this good,

LEFT Andy Powers overlooking one of his favourite surf spots near Torrey Pines – a major source of inspiration

ABOVE The Builder's Edition 912ce Grand Concert with Sitka spruce top

but I can't put it down because something is *right* about it. Other guitars you look at should be good but they just aren't. So I always thought a great instrument was one that you had fun playing."

All that said, when bringing new guitar designs to market, there needs to be more to the message than that. Powers admits that prior to its launch at Winter NAMM 2018, Taylor Guitars wrestled with the best way to introduce V-Class bracing to the world. Ultimately the decision was made to eschew any kind of Trojan Horse approach.

"We tried to figure out how you even introduce an idea like this," he recalls. "Will people even see it? You can't see it… it's inside. So we came up with the K14ce Builder's Edition guitar – here's a way to make something that looks and feels radically different to what we've done, as a way to introduce this totally different idea inside. It worked out pretty good.

"We used that same kind of mentality for the Grand Pacific guitars that you saw last year. Something totally different, totally outside the normal for what Taylor does. Totally different shape, different vibe, different feel. A whole different personality."

SHAPE SHIFTING

As the conversation turns to what's coming next, it's quickly apparent that there's no sign of the V-Class well running dry any time soon. "This year we are finally getting to make good on something we've mentioned in the past couple of years: there are a lot of other cool guitars coming," says Powers.

"One of the beautiful things about the V-Class idea is that it allows for a much wider range of guitars than what we've been able to do in the past. A lot of these different personalities that we're building into instruments are more significantly different than they would have been in the past. Which I think is a good thing, because I've never heard two guitar players play the same way before. We don't use the same sounds when we make songs. So the last several years, I've been working on a bunch of different guitars that all go in deliberately different directions.

"Now that we've introduced our V-Class idea throughout most of our line, we get to start introducing some of these other new instruments that have interesting stories and personalities by themselves. We've done more in the last year than we have ever tried to do in the past. And more complex things than ever before."

STRUNG QUARTET

Rather than one main platform, for 2020, Taylor is unleashing four new guitar designs in the Builder's Edition Collection. Powers grins when he admits that 2019 was "a little busy," but also says he's "excited for all of these guitars." Although each instrument is based on a body shape that has appeared previously in the Taylor catalogue, each of the four guitars comes loaded with ergonomic, structural and sonic refinements that steer them into uncharted waters for the brand.

The 912ce (£6,479) and 12-string 652ce (£4,319) are the first Grand Concert models in the Builder's

OPPOSITE The gorgeous Builder's Edition 652ce 12-string is reverse-strung for evocative, 60s-style tones

ABOVE Powers with the Builder's Edition 324ce in the barn workshop where much of his experimentation and early prototyping takes place

"I'VE BEEN WORKING ON A BUNCH OF GUITARS THAT ALL GO IN DELIBERATELY DIFFERENT DIRECTIONS"

ABOVE The 912ce's fast attack and compact dimensions will appeal to electric guitarists

Edition collection, while the 816ce (£4,799) reinvents the Grand Symphony body, incorporating a soundport cutaway, which required a bespoke tooling solution in order to go into production. As Powers ably demonstrates, the 816ce's spectral qualities make it a stunning instrument for solo fingerstyle performance, but the "lung power" he pinpoints as inherent in the body architecture makes it a glorious strummer, too.

We've already heard how impressive V-Class architecture is in the context of that traditional problem child – the 12-string – but the 652ce provides a further twist. Reverse-strung in the style of a Rickenbacker electric 12, you hear more of the fundamental and the guitar's tone inhabits a space somewhere between an acoustic and an electric. Powers notes that there's definitely a hint of The Beatles and Tom Petty in its sonic DNA and we have to agree.

The other Builder's Edition Grand Concert model – the 912ce – is another instrument that shares some characteristics with an electric guitar, and its fast attack and compact dimensions will surely appeal to fleet-fingered players looking to exploit the upper-fret access afforded by its bevelled cutaway.

The 324ce Grand Auditorium model (£3,239) rounds out the quartet and is perhaps the most interesting proposition of all. While Taylor leads the way in the guitar industry when it comes to long-term sustainability projects, the 324ce's tonewood selection sees the company thinking more locally and using Shamel ash for the first time as part of an urban forest initiative in collaboration with West Coast Arborists, a company that provides tree maintenance and management services to cities throughout California.

Shamel ash – which Taylor is calling 'Urban Ash' – is found growing in municipal areas and on roadsides in metropolitan areas of Southern California. When trees have reached the end of their lifespan or have become unsafe, they are often removed and turned to mulch, but it turns out that Shamel ash can be great for making guitars, too. Powers compares its tonal properties to those of Honduran mahogany and the sections used on the back and sides of the 324ce have an attractive figure.

"This particular species happens to be a great mix of the right weight, density, dimensional stability and drying attributes, and responds well to sawing, sanding and finishing," Andy says.

"One of the practical guitar-building benefits is that as these trees grow, especially those near a road, they're pruned for roadway clearance early in life. That means you end up with a round branch and knot-free trunk, which yields the clean and clear slices we look for to make guitars."

In the context of a worsening climate emergency, finding a way to turn trees you pass on your way to work into great-sounding guitars can only be applauded. Here's hoping other mainstream instrument brands follow suit.

Meanwhile, with the winter sun streaming through the windows, it's time to head home. As we leave Andy's workshop behind, we wonder how many more Builder's Edition models are already in the works. One thing's for certain, the future of Taylor Guitars is in safe hands. G

Head to p96 to read our review of the new 816ce and 324ce Builder's Edition models

musikmesse

Wednesday to Saturday
1– 4 April 2020

Early bird **discount**
Book by **1 Mar**

The **big** *anniversary* of music making!

To mark **the 40th anniversary** of **Musikmesse …**

…all roads from the world of music will be converging on Frankfurt – your chance to celebrate pure passion for music together with **industry professionals, revered international musicians** and irrepressible fans.

…and to expand your knowledge of **music education, trade** and **business** with **high-calibre lectures, presentations, workshops** and **clinics!**

And there's more: Enjoy a top-class **concert programme** at the **Musikmesse Festival** and shop till you drop at the **Musikmesse Plaza Pop-up Market** on the Friday and Saturday – **the public open days!**

info@uk.messefrankfurt.com
Tel. +44 (0) 14 83 48 39 83

messe frankfurt

CODA MUSIC

www.coda-music.com

Gibson

Great selection of Gibson 2018 USA, Memphis, Custom and Montana guitars in stock.

Echopark

With an artist roster including Joe Perry, Josh Homme & Troy Van Leeuwen - these guitars mean business! Coda Music are excited to be the first and only UK dealer to stock these stunning guitars! New delivery due soon, including Model J, 59 and La Carne.

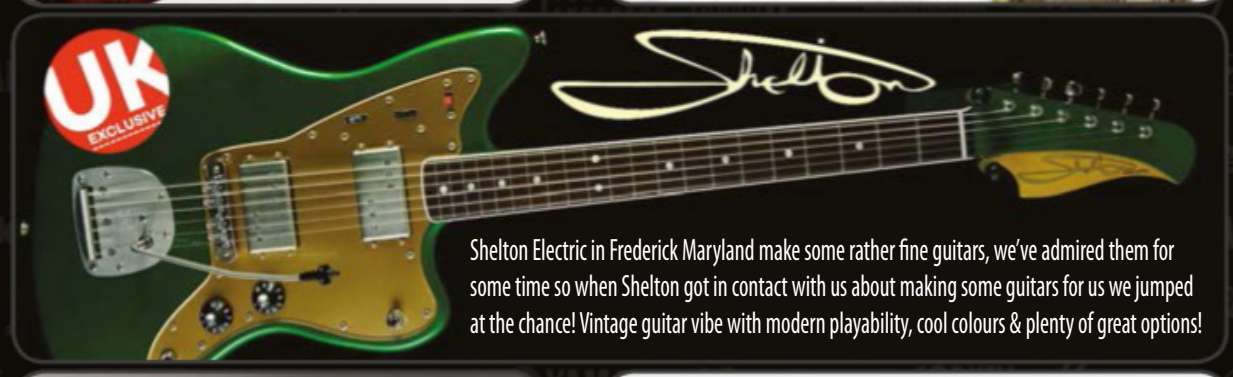
dunable custom guitars

Los Angeles

Sasha Dunable makes some scarily good guitars in Glendale California. We had one through as a trade in a while back and were so impressed that we contacted Sasha and got him to build some for us.

Fender

Leading supplier of all things Fender and Squier, whether you're after a Strat or Tele, Jaguar or Jazzmaster, Precision or Jazz, you're sure to find it at Coda Music.



Shelton Electric in Frederick Maryland make some rather fine guitars, we've admired them for some time so when Shelton got in contact with us about making some guitars for us we jumped at the chance! Vintage guitar vibe with modern playability, cool colours & plenty of great options!

Swart Amplifier Company

Here at Coda we love Swart Amps. Full range in stock from the little 6V6SE to the Atomic Space Tone, right up to the new Antares.

Full range of Two Rock Heads, Combos and Cabinets in stock

Two-Rock

FUCHS AUDIO TECHNOLOGY

Their growing product line includes Fuchs amp models from 4 to 100 watts.

Fuchs Audio Technology has established itself as a highly respected new voice in handcrafted amplification and custom effects.

fano guitars

The only place in the UK to see Fano guitars. New Fano Standard models now arriving. You could say the Fano Standard series is Fano's "greatest hits" collection. After studying their order history of custom Alt de Facto guitar line they combined the most popular requests of features & options into a new line of ready-to-play guitars.

Amazing selection of Solidbody Acoustic & Electric guitars in stock at our Stevenage store

We are delighted to be stocking Morgan amps and effects. First delivery now in.

Bartel Amplifiers

New line of amps from Mark Bartel, the amplification genius behind Tone King. Hand built by Mark in Baltimore with fantastic attention to detail & no expense spared...

100's of secondhand guitars, amps & pedals in stock, see www.coda-music.com for an up to date list.

We buy secondhand guitars - bring yours in for a quote & try something new at the same time

Novo Guitars

By • Dennis • Fano

Coda Music are proud & delighted to be dealers of these fine instruments. Visit us instore to try one today.

Famous for the stunning and, quite frankly, game-changing Alt De Facto line of guitars, Dennis has become one of the most respected master luthiers and guitar designers of modern times. Dennis has been working on a new vision for the modern electric guitar...ladies and gentlemen i give you...Novo Guitars!!!

Fender CUSTOM SHOP

WHEN YOU'RE READY A Custom Shop guitar embodies everything Fender has learned over 60 years of building the world's most revered electric solidbodies. The finest materials, all the right details, hand built in Corona, California – it's the guitar of your dreams, realised.

WE HAVE THE GUITAR FOR YOU Coda Music is Europe's biggest and best Fender Custom Shop dealer, so whether you want a perfect New Old Stock, vintage-correct model, or the heaviest of Heavy Relics with a raft of custom playability tweaks, you'll find it here and with over 100 in stock in one store you won't find a better selection anywhere.

UNIQUE TO US, UNIQUE TO YOU Our extensive in-store stock includes many custom ordered guitars, built to our own exacting specs after years of buying, selling and playing these fabulous instruments.

CAN WE BUILD IT? Yes we can! If you have that extra special something in mind, we can work with you to make it a reality. Custom orders can be ready in a matter of months and cost less than you might think – call us, email us or drop in to discuss your perfect combination of features.

CARR AMPLIFIERS

Great selection of models and finishes, Europe's number one Carr amp dealer. Carr Mercury V now in stock.

Asher Guitars & Lap Steels

Los Angeles • California

Asher Guitars & Lap Steels is dedicated to handcrafting stellar quality instruments that can be appreciated by musicians of all types.

Effects

Coda Music bring you the finest guitar effects pedals money can buy!...ready for you to demo with a your choice of amplifier and guitar!!!

Our pedal range includes the usual suspects such as Boss, Electro Harmonix, Ibanez, Jim Dunlop, Joyo, Line 6, Mesa Boogie, Mooer, MXR, Strymon, T-Rex, TC Electronic, Visual Sound, Voodoo Lab, Wampler, Way Huge, Xotic……we also have a huge selection of the less ordinary suspects like Bad Cat, Death By Audio, Earthquaker Devices, EWS, Faifield Electronic, Free The Tone, Fulltone Custom Shop, Jetter Gear, Keeley, Mad Professor, Providence, Rothwell and Sonic Edge!!!

51a High Street, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3AH t: 01438 350 815 e: stevenage@coda-music.co.uk
Acoustic Centre 27b Church Lane, Stevenage, Herts, SG1 3QW t: 01438 350815 e: acoustics@coda-music.com

Instant decision 9 months 0% finance
available on all new products over £300 on our website

REVIEWS

CONTENTS

020 GIBSON SLASH LES PAUL & J-45
096 TAYLOR BUILDER'S EDITION 816CE & 324CE
104 FENDER AMERICAN ULTRA JAZZMASTER
108 D'ANGELICO EXCEL SS
110 SUPRO BLUES KING 8
114 HUGHES & KETTNER BLACK SPIRIT 200 FLOOR
118 FENDER REFLECTING POOL, MTG:LA, TRAPPER, COMPUGILIST, SMOLDER & POUR OVER PEDALS
124 MISTWEAVER EFFECTS FORESTRY & THE SERPENT

LOOKING FOR MORE REVIEWS?
VISIT GUITAR.COM

TAYLOR GUITARS
BUILDER'S EDITION 816CE & 324CE

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

We get to grips with two of the most striking Taylors of recent times, combining urban sustainability with structural innovations

We sometimes wonder where Andy Powers gets the energy. In between surfing, hiking, parenting, playing guitar to a world-class standard and displaying expert knowledge of everything from carpentry to avocado cultivation, Taylor's resident polymath somehow finds the time to continue to push boundaries in mainstream guitar making.

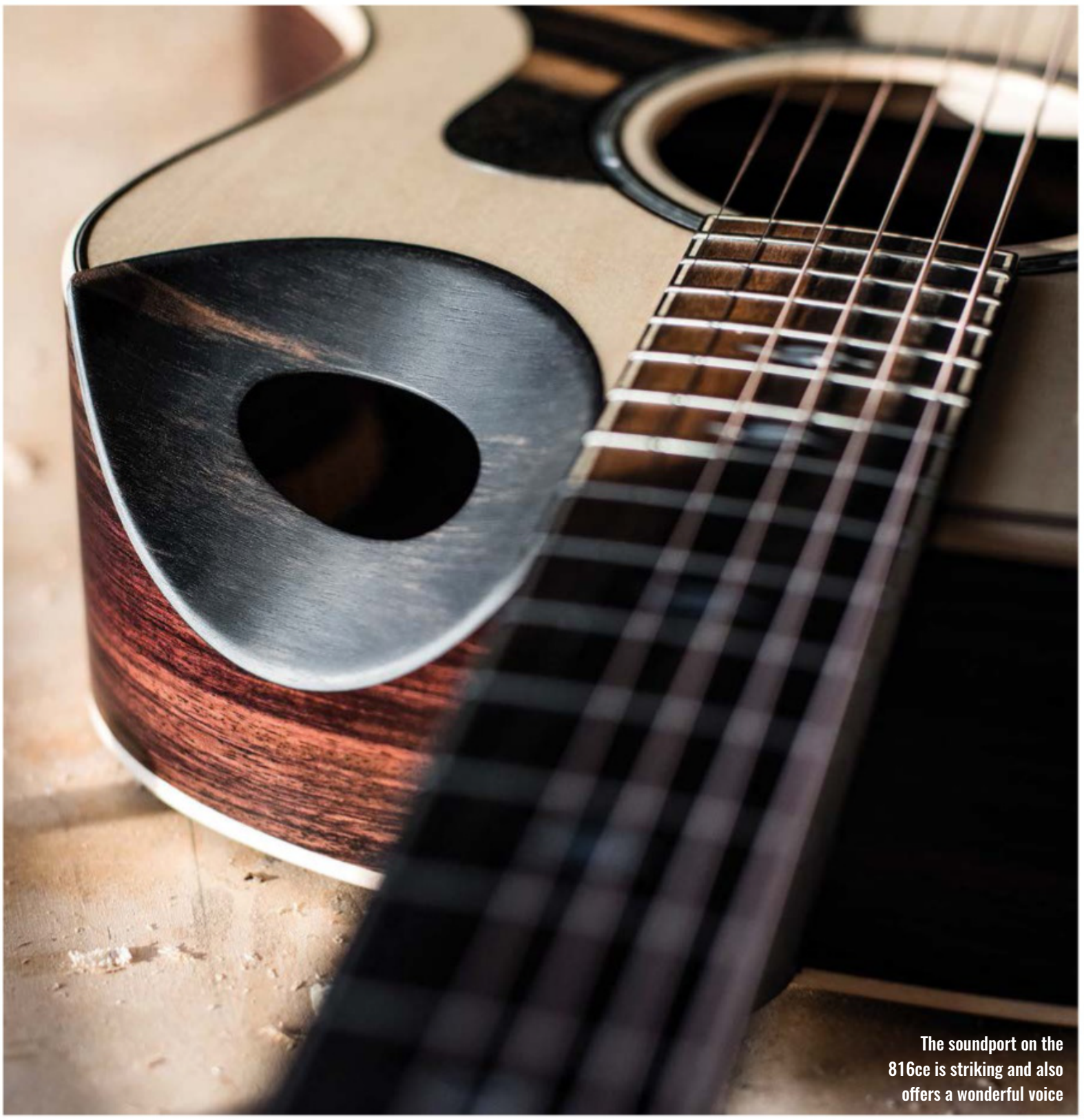
It's at the Builder's Edition level that many of Powers' innovations first appear, subsequently trickling down to more affordable price-points in the Taylor catalogue. For 2020, the Builder's Edition Collection is expanded with a quartet of new guitars and here we're taking a close look at the 816ce – a Grand Symphony model with some striking design elements – and the 324ce, a stage-ready Grand Auditorium in a courageously unusual wood combination for a brave new decade.

816CE

Back in the day, one of the first and longest-running handmade acoustic guitar festivals took place on a biannual basis in Healdsburg, California. Here, luthiers who specialised in exquisite bespoke instruments would gather to exhibit their latest creations with price tags often in five and even six figures.

With this festival came the phenomenon known as the 'Healdsburg Special' – a guitar bristling with every modern handmade luthiery flourish known to man, from body bevels and fanned multi-scale fretboards to exotic bracing solutions and soundports (often with little trapdoors) and usually constructed from the rarest and most visually spectacular woods available such as Brazilian rosewood, quilted mahogany from 'the tree' and mineralised sinker redwood, to name a few.

Taylor's design language has changed dramatically with the Builder's Edition and



The soundport on the 816ce is striking and also offers a wonderful voice

our first thought upon receiving this guitar is that it's a step towards Taylor's own 'Healdsburg Special', with the addition of a partial cutaway containing an elliptical soundport executed in figured Cameroon ebony on the treble shoulder of the guitar.

In the past 20 years, soundports have been used in steel string guitar design with varying degrees of success, usually depending on whether the port was an integral part of the instrument's original design rather than a nice touch to add to the luthier's price-list.

In a conversation this reviewer enjoyed with William 'Grit' Laskin at the 2016 Holy Grail Guitar Show in Berlin, the pioneering luthier revealed that his thoughts on soundports had sprung from learning that the waveform of a guitar's low E (82.4Hz) was around 15 feet in length and as such it made sense to let it "escape".

Andy Powers' own thoughts support this idea of 'freeing' the wave: "The lung capacity of the guitar is distributed over a larger range of frequency and a longer amount of time, so the sound comes out as very fluid. It strikes us as a strong voice that is both dynamic and filled with lyrical musical quality."

Soundports have the potential to transform the voice of an instrument, opening up a full spectrum of frequencies and nuances for player and audience alike. It is, admittedly, rare to see them used as part of a cutaway with the most common placements being in the shoulder and/or waist of the guitar. However, as Powers explains, having a soundport at a 90 degree angle to the main soundhole can affect the guitar's ability to articulate clearly and so the idea of a closer soundport within a cutaway was born.

The aim of a partial cutaway is to offer the player as much upper-fret access as possible, without unduly compromising the amount of air in the chamber and soundboard size with a full cutaway. The design here has been well executed with a single, curved piece of ebony and without the need for extra internal kerfing to support the structure, which would quickly add weight to the guitar.

Granted, luthiers such as Germany's Theo Scharpach and the UK's Nick Benjamin have used the scoop cutaway approach for a number of years, and credit for soundports in modern steel-string guitar luthiery should lie directly with the aforementioned Mr Laskin – whose contribution to modern guitar making cannot be overstated. However, we believe this is one of the first instances where those ideas have been combined, effectively recontextualising them for a wider market.

Ideally none of this should distract from the tasteful wood choice of Indian rosewood and Lutz spruce – a popular hybrid of Sitka and white spruce – which has found favour with many luthiers. Here we have a beautifully straight-grained quartersawn set of dark Dalbergia with some orange flecks for good measure. The Lutz spruce top is a creamy shade of pale with dark winter growth lines in the grain, which tightens beautifully towards the centre of the bookmatched board. In a time where quality materials

Headstock, binding and inlays are classily understated

Both guitars feature Taylor's Expression System 2 electronics

are becoming increasingly scarce, it's good to see woods of this calibre on a production instrument.

As expected, the top is underpinned with Andy Powers' V-Class bracing design with its characteristic longitudinal stiffness. It's similar in execution to the bracing in a fine archtop – just applied to the strutted monocoque construction of a steel string soundboard. And it works. Which is the main thing.

The ebony theme of the partial cutaway is echoed with a figured fretboard and pickguard in the black and orange Macassar ebony. What effect a hardwood pickguard may or may not have on the soundboard's flexibility remains unknown.

The headstock veneer and 'Curve Wing' bridge (coming close to the sublime lines of Jeff Traugott's design) are of regulation black ebony. The otherwise elegant maple and ebony body and fingerboard bindings should tie the optics together, but it is a little jarring that they stop so abruptly at the edge of the cutaway.

IN USE

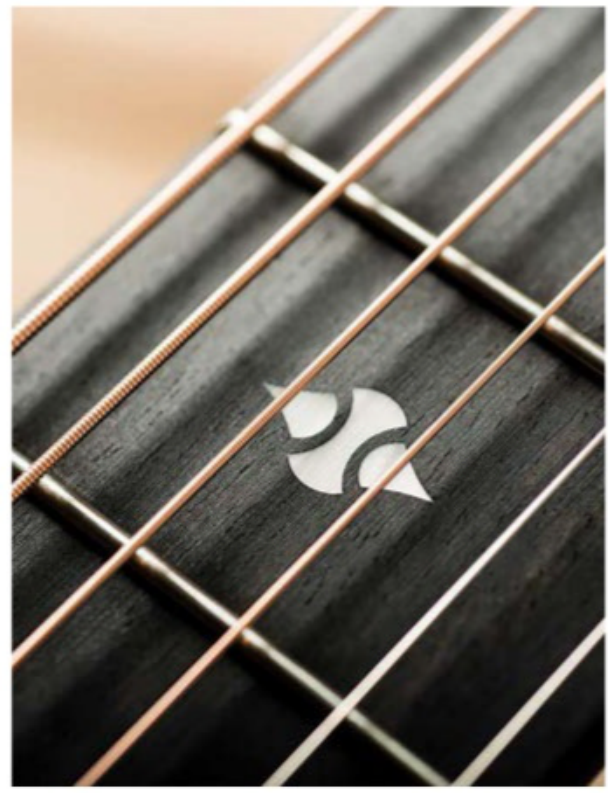
Taylor guitars are renowned for their playability, and this 816ce is no exception in that it feels exactly like a Taylor should. The neck, while a little skinny for solo fingerstyle, will strike 99 per cent of the acoustic guitar playing population as slinky and delicious. The 24-7/8-inch scale length makes expressive vibrato and bending a joy, and the fretwork is uniformly excellent. The slim, slight V carve was seemingly moulded from a thumb-over the top G chord and grants a damn-near effortless first position experience, although the corner of the nut could use just a touch more rounding.

In order to gauge the impact of the soundport design, we take the unusual step of blocking it off with a piece of foam for the first chords. The guitar's voice is typical of a high-quality spruce and rosewood instrument with a reverb-like character to the notes that works as well for spacious, expressive playing as it does for a more intricate approach. The bass response is truly haunting at times and the low end sustain is exceptional. However, the treble notes die off relatively quickly making for a slightly imbalanced decay envelope. This should, of course, smooth out as the instrument matures.

Even with the soundport covered the 816ce provides a great example of the Taylor sound, but with the foam removed there is a marked difference – the instrument comes to life, with an immediately open and beautiful voice, which gives us the sense of being surrounded by the sound. Dropping the tuning to DADGAD and applying a medium gauge celluloid pick to the 816ce takes the performance up yet another notch, giving the trebles a silky shimmer all the way up the fingerboard, while lending muscle to the bass and low mids. Improvements to upper-fret access offered by the partial cutaway are largely subtle, due in part to the depth of the neck heel.

One bone of contention when soundports are discussed is that they can often make an instrument more difficult to control when

The 324ce features softened body edges and a bevelled armrest and cutaway



The Shamel ash back has a beautiful figure

Both review guitars carry smooth Gotoh 510 tuners

plugged in. Cranking up the Builder's Edition 816ce through a Fishman Solo, at coffee shop gig volumes we find the guitar's lively acoustic personality comes through well, without it taking off in a stratospheric howl of feedback. Larger venues and the use of wedge monitors may yield different results…

Recording with the 816ce is a fun process as the soundport offers new and intriguing options for microphone choice and positioning. We find the combination of a Coles 4038 ribbon mic behind the bridge and a Gefell M300 small capsule condenser pointed off-axis towards the soundport make for particularly inspiring results – especially when strummed.

324CE

Taylor's cutaway Grand Auditorium is an objectively lovely silhouette and, in this Builder's Edition 324ce guise, it features additional ergonomic flourishes in the shape of rounded body edges, a Kevin Ryan-style forearm bevel and a bevelled cutaway. Posh!

In an effort to make the design elements of the Builder's Edition more fiscally accessible, Taylor has turned to the unusual recipe of a mahogany soundboard with back and sides of 'Urban Ash' – a name Taylor has given to the Shamel ash trees that grow abundantly in urban areas of Southern California such as Riverside and the LA Basin.

This is not the first time Taylor has paired a mahogany soundboard with an unconventional wood for the back and sides and Andy Powers has gone on record as saying that the response and voice of Urban Ash is very similar to good Honduran mahogany. Here, it proves both tone-worthy and attractive.

It's certainly spectacular looking stuff under Taylor's brooding Silent Satin sunburst finish, with a dramatic figure reminiscent of the white oak and birch guitars of the early 20th century, almost maple-like but without that level of depth to the chatoyance.

The mahogany neck has been given the same burst treatment as the body, with an unbound ebony fingerboard featuring a nicely-judged position marker design. This, along with the abalone rosette, is the only concession to bling. The ivoroid coachline body purfling also adds to the elegance. Once again, the guitar comes stage-ready with Taylor's ubiquitous ES2 active pickup system ready to plug in.

IN USE

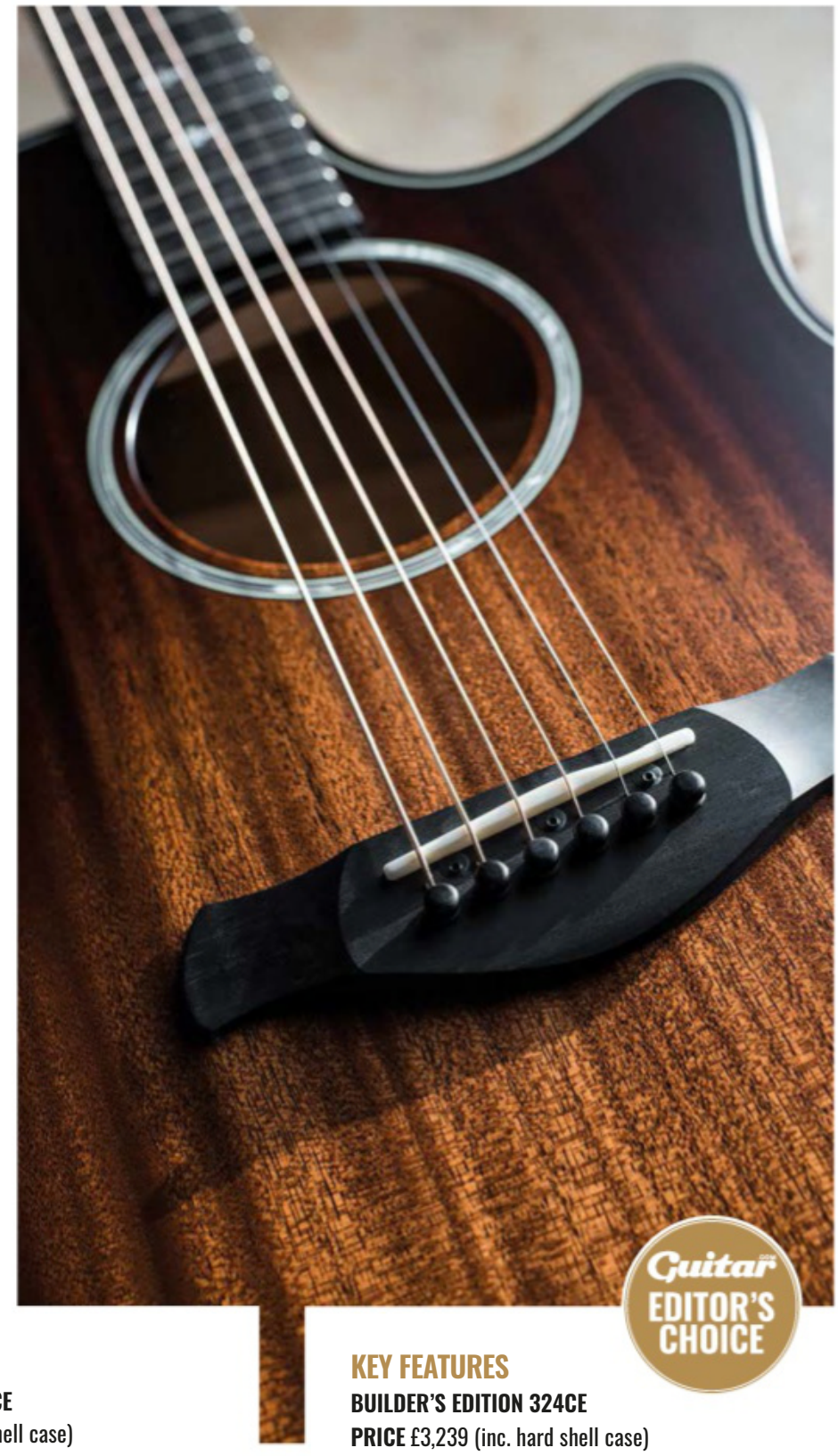
Taylor's Grand Auditorium is a famously comfortable design and the light weight of the Builder's Edition 324ce, coupled with its bevelled edges, means it's a joy to play, both seated and standing.

The sonic range occupied by the 324ce, while limited when compared to the sound-ported voice of the 816ce, occupies a very musical sweet spot. The treble response when fingerpicked is particularly smooth and inviting. It's a sound that works well on its own and excels with vocals.

The bass of a GA is never going to blow a dreadnought away, but here it is present and supportive. Like any mahogany-topped guitar, it's a touch fuzzy when pushed with the thumb and the fundamental voice means while the upper partial harmonic content when fingerpicked will never overpower, it's an engaging and very musical sound in which you can easily lose yourself.

Introducing a plectrum to proceedings reveals another side to the 324ce's character. Andy Powers describes it as being

One mark of quality, two different sounds and aesthetics



similar to a 1932 Ford Roadster: "Like a hot rod, the concept was to remove anything unnecessary". That certainly seems to be the case here. Digging in with a pick brings out a growling bass and shimmering liquid trebles which make it a surprisingly convincing guitar for bluegrass and manouche styles as well as singer-songwriter rock contexts. It's a balanced voice which decays smoothly to silence. It also fits beautifully into a mix when recorded.

It's quite remarkable to consider the ground that Taylor has covered within the Builder's Edition Collection so far and it is certainly proving an effective and creative source of ideas. Given that the V-Class bracing system has now found wide acceptance among players, it would seem that similar lines of exploration may yet make it into the company's standard lines. It's this kind of forward thinking that is widening the gap between Taylor Guitars and the competition, and it's intriguing and exciting to see these designs incorporated into inspiring and beautiful instruments.

KEY FEATURES

BUILDER'S EDITION 816CE
PRICE £4,799 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solid wood acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Grand Symphony body in Indian rosewood and Lutz spruce, 20 fret mahogany neck joining the body at the 14th fret. Macassar ebony fretboard, pickguard and partial cutaway with soundport. Ebony Curve Wing bridge. V-Class bracing
HARDWARE Gotoh 510 tuners
ELECTRONICS Taylor Expression System 2 active pickup system
SCALE LENGTH 24-7/8"/631.8mm
NECK WIDTH 39.6mm at nut, 48.9mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.7mm at first fret, 26.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 38.5mm at nut, 56.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.7lb/2.13kg
FINISH Silent Satin natural
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT taylorguitars.com

8/10 **An impressive first foray into the soundport world for Taylor – it really does make a difference!**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Turnstone Guitars TG custom build (from **£5,520**)
Benjamin Guitars custom build (from **£6,000**)
Baranik Guitars custom build (from **£7,000**)

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

KEY FEATURES

BUILDER'S EDITION 324CE
PRICE £3,239 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string solid wood acoustic guitar, made in the USA
BUILD Grand Auditorium in Shamel ash with mahogany soundboard. Chamfered body edges, cutaway and body bevel. Mahogany neck with 20 frets joining the body at the 14th fret, ebony fingerboard and Curve Wing bridge. V-Class bracing
HARDWARE Gotoh 510 tuners
ELECTRONICS Taylor Expression System 2 active pickup system
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/647.7mm
NECK WIDTH 39.6mm at nut, 48.9mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 22.7mm at first fret, 26.5mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 38.5mm at nut, 56.8mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.6lb/2.08kg
FINISH Silent Satin (Dark Roast stain and Shaded Edgeburst)
LEFT-HANDERS No

9/10 **A stripped-back racing Grand Auditorium in a new wood combo – a great all-rounder**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Furch Blue GC CM **£1,195**
Martin GPC-15ME **£1,875**
Atkin Thirty Six **£2,499**

CONTINUOUSLY MANUFACTURED IN THE UK SINCE

1958

FOUNDER JAMES HOW WITH JOHN ENTWISTLE - 1965

ROTOSOUND HAS HAD A COMPLETE FACTORY REFIT WITH ALL NEW COMPUTER CONTROLLED MACHINERY DESIGNED AND BUILT BY **JASON HOW** FOLLOWING IN HIS FATHERS TRADITION

£7.95

£8.95

£9.95

£14.95

THESE NEW STRINGS ARE WORLD BEATERS FOR **POWER, SUSTAIN** AND **LONGEVITY** PACKAGING THAT WEIGHS 3 GRAMS, ONE TENTH OF THE WEIGHT OF ALL OTHER BRANDS. THESE STRINGS WILL NEVER TARNISH OR CORRODE AS THERE IS NO PAPER OR CARDBOARD TO SOAK UP MOISTURE

JASON HOW

EXPORTED TO MORE THAN **60** COUNTRIES WORLDWIDE

PLAYED BY SOME OF THE MOST FAMOUS ARTISTS SINCE **1960**

IF YOU HAVEN'T USED ROTOSOUND FOR A WHILE YOU WILL FIND A LOT HAS CHANGED. WE WELCOME FACTORY VISITS PLEASE EMAIL **JASON@ROTOSOUND.COM** AND I WILL SHOW YOU WHAT MAKES ROTOSOUND A TRULY LEGENDARY BRAND

ROTOSOUND®

WORLD FAMOUS MUSIC STRINGS

WWW.ROTOSOUND.COM

Fender
NOISELESS
Fender
NOISELESS
Fender
PAT. F 29 72,935

Even the headstock branding is ultra-classy on this lavish update

FENDER

AMERICAN ULTRA JAZZMASTER

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

Fender rides the wave of offset guitar popularity by launching its slickest ever Jazzmaster… with some very interesting stuff going on behind the spangly scratchplate

To some, the very idea of the Fender American Ultra Jazzmaster is monstrous. It's fine for Strats and Teles to enjoy the 'luxury model' treatment, but how do you apply that to a guitar whose whole identity has become that of the underdog and the outsider?

A Jazzmaster in the smooth and sophisticated American Elite tradition really shouldn't work… and yet, as you'll already know if you've peeked at the score on this review, it does work – in a big way. It seems Fender's grumpy little indie kid – painfully misunderstood, always kicking back against the rules of the mainstream, constantly sneered at by the smart set – secretly wanted to be a prom queen all along.

Of course, that was very much the idea when the Jazzmaster was launched in 1958 as a premium guitar for jazz players. But it never really caught on until a brief starring role in 60s surf guitar, and – much later – the shaggy anti-guitarists of the late 80s embraced its unconventional looks. The un-bluesy sounds and relative affordability of the Jazzmaster made it an alt-rock icon in the age of grunge.

And now? Well, it's all got a bit out of hand. Offset-waist guitars are hipper than ever and, whether long-term fans like it or not, finding favour with players well beyond the confines of the alt-rock ghetto. They are the Converse Low Tops of the six-string world. It was only natural, then, that Fender should include one in its new flagship American Ultra range.

So, here is a Jazzmaster that's unashamedly high-class. It has Fender's latest Ultra Noiseless pickups, promising all of the tone with none of the electrical buzz; a compound-radius fretboard, flattening out from 10 inches at the nut to 14 at the top of the neck; and a reshaped heel and lower cutaway for better access to the upper frets. We also get locking tuners, a stabilised bridge and a screw-in vibrato arm.

Better than all that, though, are the electrics – because here, Fender has played no less than three fiendishly smart cards. Firstly, moving the output socket to the edge of the body has allowed for separate tone controls for each pickup, meaning you can take some treble off one without muffling the other. Secondly, an S-1 push-button hidden in the volume control has added the option of hearing both pickups in series instead of parallel. And thirdly, the

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,959 (inc. hard shell case)
DESCRIPTION Solidbody offset-waist guitar, made in USA
BUILD Alder or ash body, bolt-on maple neck, 10-14" compound radius maple or rosewood fingerboard with 21 medium jumbo frets and bone nut
HARDWARE Locking tuners, floating bridge with Mustang saddles and nylon post inserts, screw-in vibrato arm with up-bend lock button
ELECTRICS 2x Ultra Noiseless Vintage Jazzmaster pickups with three-way switch, master volume with S-1 series/parallel switching, independent tone controls; phase-flip switch with independent volume controls
SCALE LENGTH 25.5"/648mm
NECK WIDTH 43.2mm at nut, 52.1mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 21.0mm at first fret, 22.2mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 36mm at nut, 52mm at bridge
WEIGHT 4.0kg/8.8lb
FINISH Plasma Red Burst polyurethane (as reviewed), Mocha Burst, Cobra Blue, Ultraburst
LEFT-HANDERS No
CONTACT fender.com

The bridge is fitted with Mustang-style saddles

Pushing the switch in the volume control engages the clever S-1 switching...

...and there's a set of locking Fender tuners

old 'rhythm circuit' has been replaced by a phase-flipped mode that lets you control the quackiness by changing the relative levels of the two pickups.

Of course, such bold innovation requires presentation to match… and here's where Fender is going to alienate some people. Perhaps you've already formed an opinion on this slightly lurid Plasma Red Burst finish, with its pearloid scratchplate and maple fingerboard. Perhaps you've also noticed the black neck binding, as applied to a handful of offsets in the 70s when the company seemed to be losing its way, and are wondering if its presence here represents an act of industrial sabotage. We couldn't possibly comment.

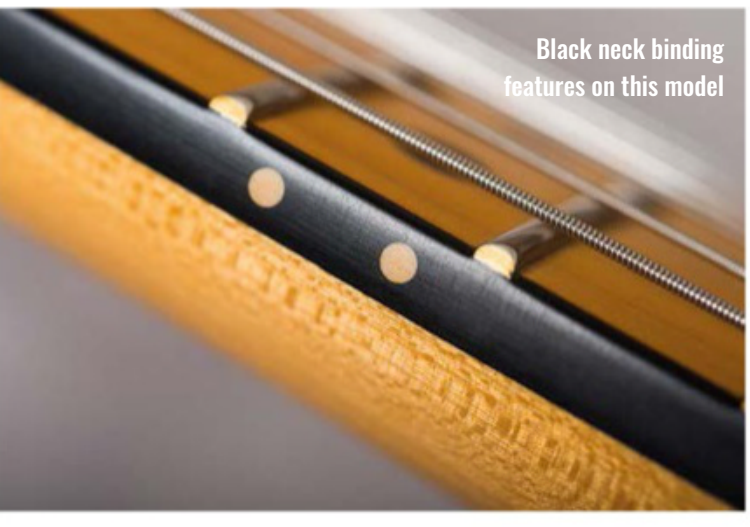
What we can say, however, is that gaudy red and Cobra Blue are not the only options: there's also the more traditionally styled Ultraburst with tortie pickguard and a Mocha Burst finish that comes with a plain mint 'guard. Both have cream-bound rosewood 'boards. The Mocha Burst is still not the sort of thing we can imagine Thurston Moore attacking with a drumstick, but it's quite stunning up close.

IN USE

You don't even need ears to appreciate some of the thinking that's gone into this guitar. Right out of the case it's an easy, issue-free player – and that's not something you can take for granted with a Jazzmaster.

As on the American Professional model, the nylon inserts around the bridge posts

Fender's Ultra Noiseless pickups are a welcome addition



Black neck binding features on this model

will annoy purists, but they still allow some back-and-forth rocking, and tuning stability is excellent. Meanwhile the satin-finished 'modern D' neck keeps your left hand supremely comfortable, while the compound-radius fretboard allows for a slick action without choking – even if the 9.5-inch radius of the saddles means the D and G strings are a little high towards the top end of the 'board.

And then we come to the really important bit: sounds. It's fair to say previous generations of Fender's hum-cancelling Noiseless pickups haven't been widely appreciated for their tonal chops, but there's not much wrong with this pair. They have plenty of chime without being ice-picky, while the mids are so sweet and sticky you'll want to brush your teeth afterwards. In short, this is absolutely a 'real' Jazzmaster – just one that doesn't buzz like a hornet swarm whenever you turn to face your amp.

The sound of both pickups in series isn't especially appealing, but the added shunt provided by this setting could be handy for a subtle solo boost, so we can't argue with its inclusion – especially as the switch is more or less invisible. The dual tone controls are another less-than-essential addition, as the two pickups are pretty well matched for treble content anyway; but again, it's an unobtrusive feature and could come in useful on occasion, so why not?

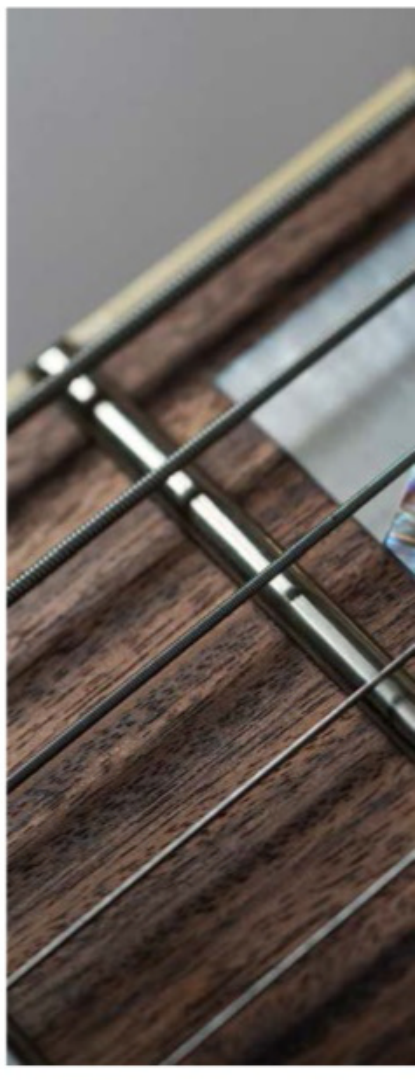
Of the three new wiring tricks, however, it's the third – that phase-switching circuit at the top of the guard – that really stands out as a worthy modification to this 62-year-old design. Flipping the switch, as on the American Professional Jaguar, engages a strangulated quack along the lines of the middle/bridge setting on a Strat; but now we have a couple of roller dials to play with as well. Just a small roll back on one pickup's output level alters the balance in favour of the other, changing the timbre and reducing the 'phasiness' in a way that opens up a whole new range of usable sounds.

The marketing talk of an infinite tonal palette is probably overcooking it a tad, but that doesn't stop this Jazzmaster being, in practical terms, surely the most versatile guitar in all of Fender's current line-up. Not bad for an underdog. G

9/10 **A USA-made Jazzmaster that plays right and sounds right straight out of the box**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Novo Serus J **£3,299**, Shelton GalaxyFlite Blaster **£2,699**, Fender Vintera '60s Jazzmaster **£799**



D'ANGELICO
EXCEL SS

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

A thinline slice of jazz-and-beyond goodness from D'Angelico's top-tier Korean workshop

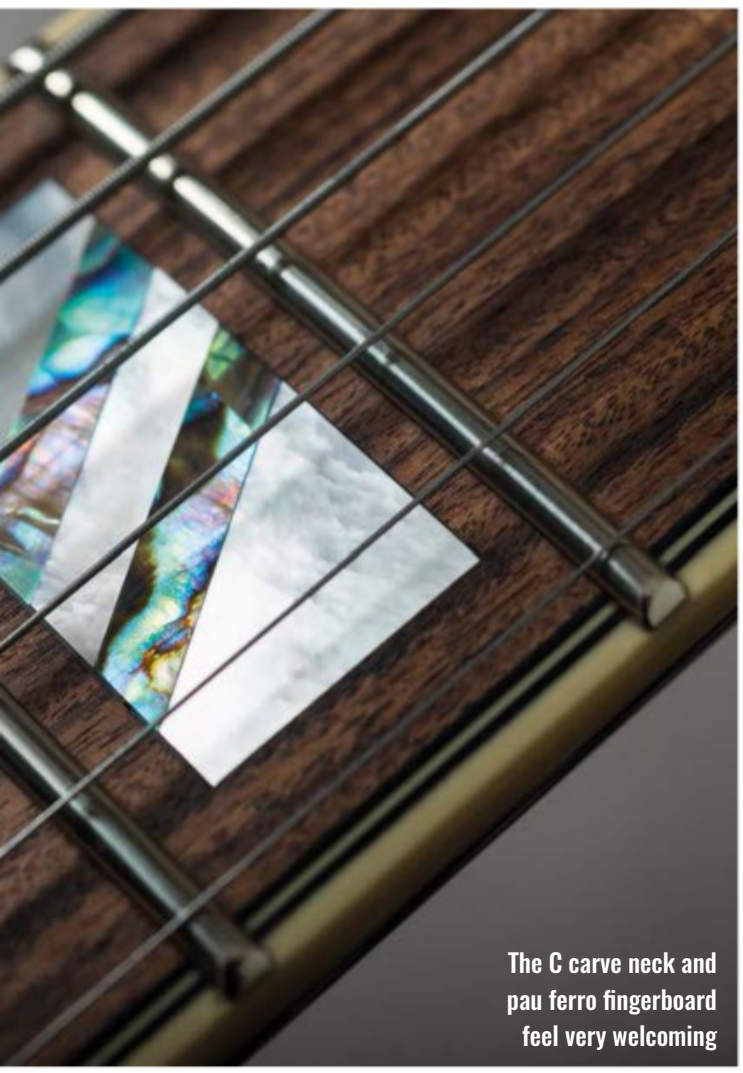
Resurrected in 2011, the D'Angelico company originally won a fabled reputation in the 1930s with a line of exquisite hand-made archtops created in John D'Angelico's tiny workshop in Little Italy, Manhattan.

Now the brand offers a selection of instruments inspired by those original D'Angelico instruments, with production taking place in Asia. This Excel SS model is created by D'Angelico's crack team of Korean super-luthiers who are responsible for the brand's high-end models, and at first glance it certainly looks like a guitar that could command a serious price tag.

The updated Excel SS is a thinline, single-cut archtop with a silhouette not a million miles away from an Ibanez George Benson or Gibson Howard Roberts. The body is a slim 1.75-inches at its deepest point and a peep through the f-holes confirms the presence of a centre-block, which will no doubt reduce the risk of unwanted feedback. The top, back and sides are made from politely flamed maple under an elegant Ice Tea Burst finish and the shallow C carved, 'set-thru' neck (also maple) joins the body at the 16th fret.

D'Angelico's house style has always been informed by Art Deco opulence and the Excell SS is no exception with its gold hardware – including a set of Grover Super Rotomatic tuners – mother of pearl inlay work and multi-ply bindings, not to mention the ebony control knobs. The exuberant headstock design in particular should tell you all you need to know.

The Excel SS comes loaded with a pair of Seymour Duncan 59 humbuckers, which



The C carve neck and pau ferro fingerboard feel very welcoming

Multi-ply binding adds to an air of opulence

The exuberant headstock is an Art Deco throwback

Seymour Duncan 59 Humbuckers provide myriad tones

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £1,569 (inc. hard case)
DESCRIPTION 6-string semi-hollow electric guitar, made in Korea
BUILD Flame maple back, sides and top, 'set-thru' maple neck, 22 medium-jumbo frets, 16" radius pau ferro fretboard with mother of pearl/abalone fretboard inlays, bone nut, ebony knobs, 5-ply body binding
HARDWARE Grover Super Rotomatic locking tuners, tune-o-matic bridge and stop tailpiece
ELECTRONICS 2x Seymour Duncan 59 Humbuckers, 2x volume, 2x tone (pull for coil split), 3-way toggle pickup selector switch
SCALE LENGTH 24.75"/629mm
NECK WIDTH 42.8mm at nut, 53mm at 12th fret
NECK DEPTH 20mm at first fret, 22mm at 12th fret
STRING SPACING 37mm at nut, 50mm at bridge
WEIGHT 3.6kg/8lb
LEFT-HANDERS No
FINISH Ice Tea Burst (as reviewed), Natural, Cherry, Black
CONTACT dangelicoguitars.com

can be coil-split via push/pull tone knobs. There's an ivoroid tipped three-position switch and twin volumes, too. All good.

IN USE

Both seated and standing, the Excel SS is an extremely comfortable guitar to get around. It's light in weight, beautifully balanced and the shallow C carve neck and pau ferro fingerboard feel very welcoming.

A small tube amp with just a kiss of spring reverb seems the ideal choice for this guitar, a hypothesis confirmed by the first notes through the neck humbucker, which are really quite delicious. More Byrdland than Super 400, the Excel SS never sacrifices articulation or nuance with a clear front to the note at all times. Bebop staccato runs and 'yacht-jazz' octave melody lines come through beautifully – we have rarely encountered this quality of extended chord melody tone outside the work of specialist archtop luthiers who command much higher prices. We wonder how it would sound with flatwounds…

While the in-between tones are also strong, especially when one or both pickups is coil split, the bridge on its own reveals a diamond-encrusted switchblade hidden under the fur coat of this guitar. Dialling up the gain, we are rewarded with a ferocious Les Paul meets ES-335 blues/classic rock voice, which takes off into musical harmonic feedback with minimum provocation. It's very raucous, in a very good way.

While its pedigree would suggest an instrument purely for jazz lovers, the Excel SS is capable of much more. From thick fusion distortion and skinny funk to math-rock modular effect textures and indie chime, the Excel SS loves it all.

9/10 **A slimline archtop which handles both jazz whispering and blues screaming with panache. Nice!**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Gibson ES-235 **£1399**, Guild Starfire III Newark St **£1025**, PRS S2 Vela Semi-Hollow **£1599**

SUPRO
BLUES KING 8

WORDS HUW PRICE

A single watt of output power may seem better suited to headphones than headlining, but the Supro Blues King 8 is a lot more practical than you might expect…

Last year's Supro Blues King 12 was a reasonably-priced tone monster and a potential Blues Junior killer, but 15-watts can still be too much amplifier for some scenarios. Enter its smaller sibling, the similarly mid-century styled Blues King 8.

There are myriad reasons for using lower power amps – from enforced volume limits at venues to sound engineers who insist on 'having control', even if that means your tone suffers. Powerful amps may still serve a purpose at outdoor festivals and arenas, but few of us play gigs like that, and with modern PAs, nobody needs 100-watts to be heard beyond the moshpit. In fact, the trend towards low-powered amps for gigs has followed developments in recording.

That's where Supro's Blues King 8 comes in. Rated at one-watt and packing an eight-inch speaker, this clearly isn't designed for gigging. Instead, the Blues King 8 is for practising and recording. Supro even promises that it will produce "an enormous studio sound when placed in front of a microphone".

This 'small amp/big sound' paradox has been well understood for decades, and we'll find out if that's the case with this Supro. But this model also has a couple of neat features that would never have been considered in the 1950s – namely a master volume and a buffered line level output.

A master volume on a one-watt amp may seem as incongruous as an aerofoil on a snail, but we'll soon discover it makes perfect sense. The line output can be used

ABOVE Suprisingly for such a low-wattage combo, the Blues King 8 has a master volume control

RIGHT The boost function is also footswitchable

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £349
DESCRIPTION Single-channel class A valve combo with switchable boost, poplar ply cabinet, assembled in USA
POWER RATING 1W
CONTROLS Volume, tone, master, boost switch
REAR PANEL Line output, footswitch socket
VALVES 1x 12AX7, 1x 12AU7
SPEAKER BK8 custom 8”
DIMENSIONS 330 x 170 x 330 mm
WEIGHT 7kg/15lb
CONTACT jhs.co.uk, suprousa.com

to feed a mixing desk or a DAW for direct recording, and Supro also suggests plugging it into higher-powered amplifiers to use the Blues King 8 as a valve overdrive.

Speaking of which, this amp has two valves – a 12AX7 in the preamp and a 12AU7 ‘power tube’. The 12AU7 is a dual triode that’s more commonly used in preamps – the Blues King 8 operates in single-ended mode, with both sides of the 12AU7 running in parallel rather than push-pull. As such, this amp can be considered to be running in class A.

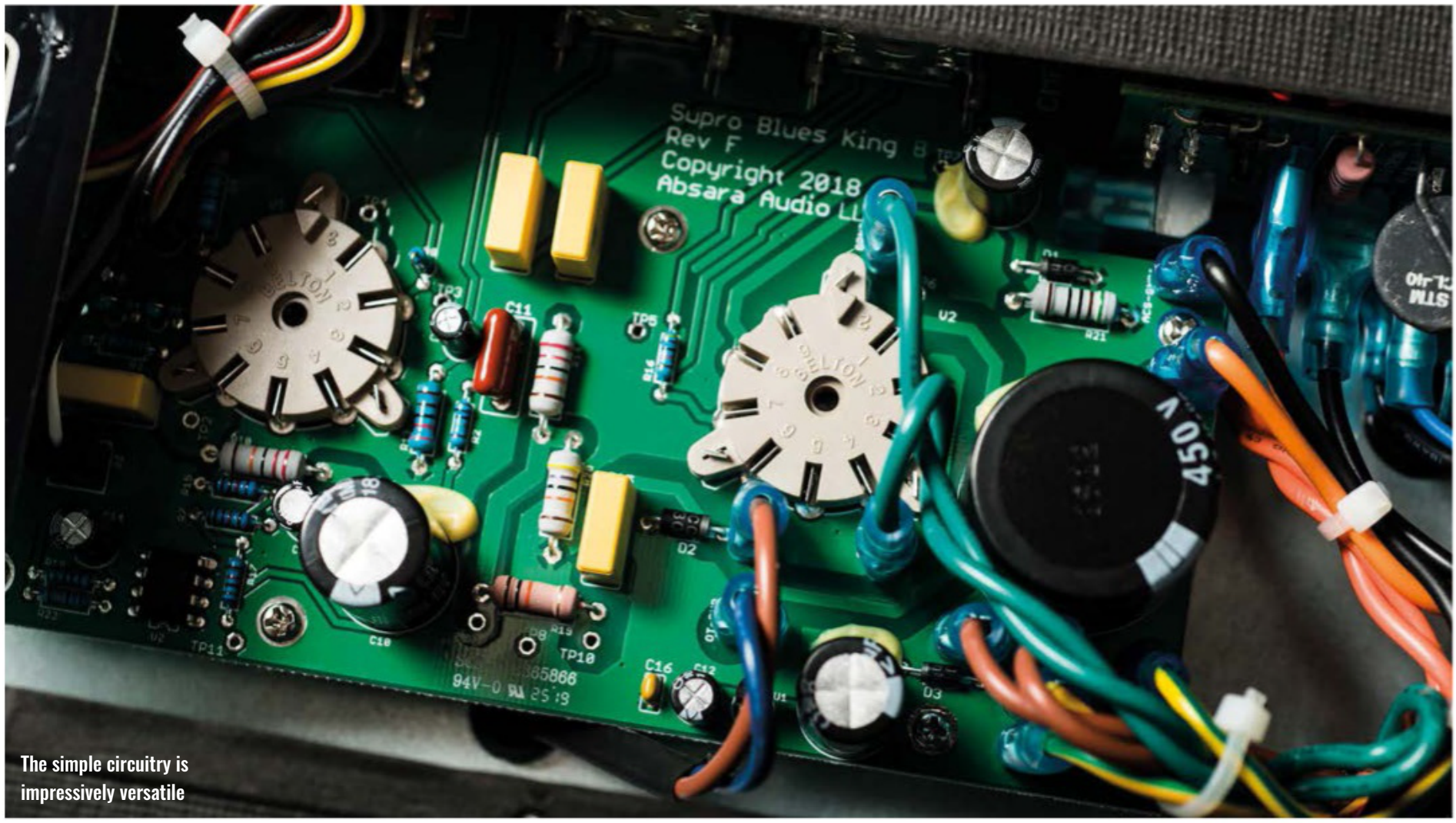
Other features include a boost function that can also be footswitched, a custom 8-inch speaker designed to emulate an old-school field coil driver and a poplar cabinet based on Supro’s mid-50s Spectator model. And if you think the great looks and finish are an attempt to emulate the boutique brigade, it’s actually the other way around.

IN USE

We’ll address the volume aspect first because it applies to everything this amp is and does. Unsurprisingly, this isn’t a loud amplifier, but we find it exactly right for its stated uses. A Fender Champ’s four-watt output makes it too loud to crank up and play along with an unplugged acoustic or most unamplified singers – in contrast, the Blues King 8 can be driven and fine tuned to perform better in the same circumstances.

The looks, speaker and product description all evoke the 1950s, and the sonic character is equally in keeping. It’s rude, gritty and has a convincingly vintage midrange honk. Although our experience with vintage field coil speakers is limited, the onboard driver compresses and breaks up in a similar way to 1950s Jensens.

Rather than being a limiting factor, the lack of sheer volume on the Blues King 8 is the selling point. If there is one potential limitation, it’s a slight darkness. Throughout our tests we keep the tone control at, or



The simple circuitry is impressively versatile

The line out can feed a DAW, a mixer or turn the amp into an overdrive

Valves are a 12AX7 (preamp) and 12AU7 (power tube)

close to, maximum, and even with Strats and Teles, shimmering Silverface-style treble isn't part of the deal. If a guitar has darker-sounding pickups this will be noticeable, but there's no lack of clarity, and this upper treble roll-off suits the mid-50s vibe.

Predictably enough, there's not a massive amount of clean headroom, but again that's a good thing. The Blues King 8 is particularly effective at that 'edge of breakup' point where you can control the overdrive with the dynamics of your playing. It's sweetly articulate and there's ample clarity for the sonic subtleties of all our test guitars to come through.

The master volume does allow you to crank up the preamp gain, but the Blues King 8 sounds its best when the power stage is being driven, too. It's a full, harmonically loaded and undeniably exciting brand of overdrive that equates to sheer fun. The experience is very much like cranking up a medium powered tweed or Vox-style amp, but hearing those tones at a fraction of the volume you'd expect.

There's no mini-amp boxiness either, so although it's tonally small, it's perfectly formed. Stick a microphone on the Supro and the illusion is complete because it's doubtful that anybody could tell it's a tiny one-watt amp. Through monitor speakers, the Blues King 8 sounds like a full-fat valve guitar amp, and because the power is so low and the speaker surface so small, it's very easy to record. There's also no concern about damaging ribbon microphones or neighbour relations.

Plugging the line output into another guitar amp mutes the Blues King 8's output and provides a massive level boost to the second amp's input. With the boost engaged on the Supro, it's actually too much – we get better results in non-boost mode. However, the creamy and sustaining Supro overdrive that we were hoping for at higher volume doesn't materialise. We also learn that the treble roll-off cannot be attributed to the preamp circuitry because the tone gets so much brighter. Time to try a different approach.

Next we connect the Supro speaker output to a Fane A60 12-inch and discover that the onboard speaker isn't darkening the tone either. In fact, we prefer the way the Blues King 8 sounds with the stock cabinet and speaker, but the idea of using it as an overdrive is moot without some way to tame the output level. As a DI source, an amp and cab simulator would be needed to make the tone more palatable.

Ultimately, what we have here is a very stylish and fine-sounding low power valve amp that offers thermionic thrills at very reasonable volume levels. So long as you understand its limitations, the keenly priced Supro Blues King 8 has the tone and features to be a great go-to practice and home recording amp. G

8/10 **Great looks, very enjoyable tone and surprisingly versatile**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Blackstar HT-1R MkII **£279**, Marshall DSL1CR **£219**, Vox AC4C1-12 **£420**

ATB GUITARS

– FORMERLY ATOYBOY GUITARS –

NEW SHOWROOM JUST OPENED!!

Come and visit us, by appointment, in our newly refurbished showroom in Regency Cheltenham at the heart of the Cotswolds

All our stock will be on display for trial, together with a cool range of vintage amps and some irresistible coffee.

WE BUY AND SELL VINTAGE GIBSON AND FENDER GUITARS FROM THE 50'S 60'S AND 70'S - THAT'S ALL WE DO, AS SIMPLE AS THAT!

Visit us at www.atbguitars.com for full details and quality photos of all items
Follow us on Facebook or Instagram for news of daily arrivals

– AT THE TIME OF WRITING SOME OF THE ITEMS WE HAVE IN STOCK INCLUDE: –

1957 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster
1956 Gibson ES-5N Switchmaster Blonde
1959 Gibson ES-355 Mono Stoptail
1960 Gibson ES-345 TDSV Cherry PAF's
1962 Gibson ES-335 TD PAF PAT
1964 Gibson ES-345 TDVC
1956 Gibson ES-175D
1959 Gibson ES-175D Players
1967 Gibson ES-330L Burgundy

1934 Gibson Super 400

1957 Fender Stratocaster Mary Kaye
1959 Fender Stratocaster maple neck
1961 Fender Stratocaster Blonde
1962 Fender Stratocaster Fiesta Red
1963 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White
1969 Fender Stratocaster S/B
1973 Fender Stratocaster LPB
1982 Fender Stratocaster AVRI

1952 Fender Telecaster ex-Lenny Kravitz
1953 Fender Telecaster
1956 Fender Telecaster
1958 Fender Telecaster Custom Prototype CATALOGUE guitar!
1967 Fender Custom Telecaster Candy Apple Red
1968 Fender Telecaster Thinline
1969 Fender Telecaster Sonic Blue

1959 Fender Jazzmaster Blonde
1963 Fender Jaguar Blonde Gold
1966 Fender Jaguar Olympic White

1952 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1955 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1968 Gibson Les Paul Goldtop
1958 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1960 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1974 Gibson Les Paul Custom
1955 Gibson Les Paul Junior
1959 Gibson Les Paul Junior 3/4
1960 Gibson Les Paul TV Junior
1956 Gibson Les Paul TV Special
1962 Gibson Les Paul SG STD Ebony Block
1963 Gibson Les Paul SG STD
1963 Gibson Korina Flying V White

1966 Fender Jazz Bass Sonic Blue MINT
1953 Fender Precision Bass
1980 Musicman Bass MINT!

1963 Gretsch Tennessean
1972 Dick Knight Custom Twin Neck ex Jon Camp Renaissance
1967 Rickenbacker 360/12 Gold Parts

1964 Epiphone FT110 Frontier
1968 Martin 00-18C

2005 PRS Employees Model Santana 2
2016 PRS DGT Private Stock
2015 Gibson True Historic Ace Frehley
2016 Gibson True Historic R9 Tom Murphy

WE WILL PAY EXTREMELY GOOD MONEY FOR SIMILAR VINTAGE GUITARS.

A selection of recent sales »

1967 Gibson ES-335 TD Pelham Blue

1957 Gibson ES-5 Switchmaster

1952 Fender Telecaster Blackguard

1956 Gibson Les Paul Standard MINT

1969 Gibson Flying V

1964 Fender Stratocaster Olympic White

www.atbguitars.com atbguitars atbguitars @atbguitars
Email: info@atbguitars.com • Tel: 01242 697607 • Int: +44 1242 697607

HUGHES & KETTNER

BLACK SPIRIT 200 FLOOR

Guitar EDITOR'S CHOICE

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

If you're Hughes & Kettner, there's only one way to improve on a programmable 200-watt amp with valve-emulating analogue tone and onboard effects: turn it into a stompbox

It's obvious when you think about it. Why bother having a separate multi-channel amp and foot controller when, with the benefit of an analogue tone-generating tech solution that doesn't require the bulk of real valves, you can plonk the whole thing on the floor?

That's the thinking that led Hughes & Kettner to design this pedalboard version of its 200-watt Black Spirit head. It looks like a standard multi-effects unit, maybe with some preamp and speaker emulation options; but no, the H&K Black Spirit 200 Floor isn't an alternative to your amplifier – it *is* the amplifier. Which just leaves two questions: does it perform well enough to replace your usual heavyweight head… and how long is your speaker cable?

Setting aside the minor practical issue of having your amp at the front of the stage (while your cab is presumably at the back), the basic specs suggest this device isn't so much a Swiss Army knife as a Red Army tank regiment, with the power and range to cover most players' needs both live and in the studio. That's not least because of its 200-watt output, which is switchable down to 20 or two watts and is accompanied by a DI out with eight cab emulations.

And it's programmable – with 128 editable presets – but it's analogue, with H&K's proprietary Spirit technology claiming to recreate the tone and feel of valve-based circuitry in a much smaller, lighter format.

We don't know exactly how the tech works, but we do know where it lives

The sagging control dials in authentic squishy saturation and different cab types

The Black Spirit 200 now comes in head, combo and floor formats

thanks to the mysterious glowing orange bar right in the middle of the unit.

The footswitches can be used in three different ways: preset mode has you scrolling up and down through 32 banks of four sounds each (selectable via switches A to D); stompbox mode engages straightforward channel switching (clean, crunch, lead and ultra plus three effects) and 'direct 7' mode lets you assign seven favourite presets to flip between.

In terms of connectivity, you're properly spoilt – this thing's got more holes than a vintage Emmental. The back panel's most important features are two speaker outs plus an effects loop and H&K's familiar Red Box DI module, while the guitar input is on the left edge of the unit along with ins and outs for, unusually, two more effects loops. These are 'pre-everything' – the idea being that pedals you wouldn't want to put in a post-preamp loop can be switched in and out en masse using the Black Spirit's presets. Finally, on the right side, next to the footswitch mode selector, there are two inputs for expression pedals.

Now, the controls. The key feature to note is that seven of the knobs are dual-function, controlling either amp settings or, when the 'FX access' button is engaged, effects. There aren't many of those – it's not the focus, as you might have guessed from the inclusion of all those loops for your own pedals – but you do get a full set of three controls for the delay, while the modulation dials allow a limited amount of adjustment within each of the four types: chorus, flanger, phaser and tremolo. There's also a boost, which is voiced differently according to the selected channel but is fixed for level. Arguably the most interesting controls are those marked sagging, resonance and presence – these mimic the variable characteristics of valve output stages, letting you alter the overall character and responsiveness of the amp.

And there's one more feature to mention: Bluetooth. Yep, in theory you can control the Black Spirit 200 Floor via an Android or iOS device. We say 'in theory' because ours refused to connect to either; but honestly, we can't see that there's any genuinely useful functionality here, other than the ability to give funny names to your presets.

IN USE

Pretty much everything on the Black Spirit

Connectivity is excellent, with H&K's Red Box DI module (above) at the rear and two 'extra' pre-FX loops on the side

KEY FEATURES

PRICE £899
DESCRIPTION Stompbox-format programmable solid-state amp with four channels and onboard effects, made in China
POWER RATING 200W
CONTROL PANEL Pre loop 1 and 2 on/off, boost button, clean/crunch/lead/ultra channel switch; dual controls for gain and effect intensity, volume and modulation effect type, bass and delay time, mids and delay feedback, treble and delay level, noise gate threshold and reverb, sagging and emulated cab type (1-8) for Red Box output, FX access button for secondary control functions; resonance, presence, master volume, headphones/line output, FX loop, preset store and power buttons
REAR PANEL Two 8/16-ohm speaker outputs with switches for full-range/guitar cab and 2/20/200W; Red Box XLR output with switches for emulation on/off and line/mic level; MIDI in and out/through, effects loop send and return, aux in (mini-jack), XLR monitor feed input with level control
SIDE PANELS Guitar input, pre loop 1 and 2 send and return; footswitch mode switch (preset, stompbox, direct 7), two expression pedal inputs
OPTIONS Soft carry bag, £59
DIMENSIONS 470 x 255 x 70mm
WEIGHT 14.1kg/8.9lb
CONTACT jhs.co.uk, hughes-and-kettner.com

200 Floor can be assigned to presets. So you can set it up to hop from a clean tone with light tremolo to a high-gain scream with phaser, delay, boost, less sag, more presence… and all 15 of the fuzz pedals in your effects loop switched on. That's an extreme example – please don't feel obliged to try it out – but you get the idea.

Inevitably, most of the factory presets sound over-processed and really not very nice. But they're easily edited – and the core amp sounds are remarkably good. Ideally, you'd have a wall of cabs to do them all justice, but even through the same 1x12 you could easily lose an afternoon scrolling through Blackface-style cleans, rock-riffing crunch tones and many, many flavours of shred-friendly high-gain indulgence.

Maybe the cleaner stuff doesn't quite stack up to the very best in terms of purity and touch-sensitivity, but it's more than decent – and those extra controls for the output stage are a genuine bonus. Presence crisps things up in the usual way, sagging lets you dial in authentic squishy saturation, while resonance allows the low-end to be as loose or tight as you want it. It's all very 'valvey' and makes the Black Spirit 200 just about the most versatile non-digital amp we've ever used. Sounds-wise, it's highly versatile.

Of course, not everyone insists on plugging into a cab – which is where the Red Box output comes in, either for direct-to-PA live use or as a silent recording tool. And H&K's little circuit sounds great with that eight-way 'cab type' control. All the bases are covered, including four different 4x12s, and all eight are very useable.

The only potential snag with the Red Box is that it doesn't do instant switching – new sounds actually fade in after a moment of silence. We're guessing this is a safety measure to protect PAs from sudden leaps in level, which is a thoughtful touch but does mean DI isn't really an option for mid-song channel-hoppers. Thinking you could get away without that extra-long speaker cable after all? Sorry!

9/10 **A ridiculously versatile amp in a handy stompable format**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Taurus Stomp-Head 5 **£788**, BluGuitar Amp1 **£699**, Milkman Sound The Amp **£649**

Honeyboy AMPS

Custom built for you

CUSTOM HARDWOOD CABS

CLASSIC HAND MADE TUBE AMPLIFIERS

Don't Start me talkin'

Touch Sensitivity, outstanding dynamics and superb tone. Two fabulously usable channels with massive sonic scale. Classic tweed tone without any compromises, paired with truly outstanding build quality. (30w 3x10) *The Guitar Magazine*

It's a really versatile amp, ideal for getting a fabulous tone without deafening everyone in earshot. It reminds me very much of the vintage 40s Gibsons. Its ideal for smaller club dates and delivers a killer tone. For recording its an absolute pleasure. (5w) *Chris Corcoran*

Fantastic Amps. The cabs are pretty special. The oak gives the amps a nice focus. I fell in love with the 3x10, best one I've played. (30w)
Tommy Harkenrider

AWESOME ROCK 'N' ROLL

Honeyboy AMPS *Range*

5w Combo , 18w Combo , 30w Combo
Speaker Cab formats: 1x12 2x6 2x8 2x10 2x12

Hand-wired classic 1950's circuits
Hand-built tone-enhancing hardwood cabinets
Wide range of stand-out finishes

www.honeyboyamps.com Facebook.com/honeyboyamps Instagram.com/honeyboyamps

FENDER

REFLECTING POOL DELAY & REVERB, MTG:LA TUBE DISTORTION, TRAPPER DUAL FUZZ, COMPUGILIST COMP/DISTORTION, SMOLDER ACOUSTIC OD & POUR OVER ENVELOPE FILTER

WORDS RICHARD PURVIS

The latest delivery from Fender's ever-expanding pedal empire includes everything from beefy valve overdrive to immersive reverb and delay… with one or two surprises along the way

It's two years since Fender surprised many at the 2018 NAMM show by announcing a bold new approach to the business of effects pedals – namely, making seriously good ones. That launch line-up of six stompboxes has now grown to 21, and the latest batch are as diverse in function as they are in the colours of their brushed metal enclosures.

The real eye-catcher here is the suitably aquatic-looking Reflecting Pool, a combined delay and reverb pedal with the kind of multi-mode digital flexibility familiar to fans of Strymon and Line 6. This is the first of the new Fender pedals to break the £200

barrier, which makes it a bit of a big deal… but that's not to say we're any less intrigued by the other five.

In a contrasting jacket of fiery orange sits the MTG:LA, a variant of the valve-powered MTG Tube Distortion with a more American sound than the Marshall-leaning original. Then there's the Trapper, a dual fuzz with some octave and gating tricks; and the Compugilist, whose name makes a lot more sense once you realise it's a two-in-one pedal based on the Bends compressor and Pugilist distortion.

Next we come to the oddball of the bunch, the Smolder Acoustic OD. Yep, it's an overdrive for acoustic instruments, complete with a 'compensation' dial to tame zingy piezo pickups and cab simulation for plugging directly into stage PAs. That just leaves the Pour Over, a multi-mode envelope filter with switchable onboard distortion.

As ever we get tiny LED position markers that can be turned off via a switch on the back panel if you're a real fun-hater, and Fender's ingenious flip-open battery compartment in all those pedals that don't require mains power – that is, all but the Reflecting Pool, whose digital processing would slurp a PP3 dry in minutes, and the MTG:LA, whose subminiature valve is similarly thirsty.

IN USE

There's a lot of sounds and functions to get through with these diverse new pedals, so let's strip down to our sunburst Speedos and plunge straight into the Pool. It is, in a word, deep. In all there are nine reverbs to choose from: three halls, three rooms and three 'special' models – an octave-up shimmer, a reverse/gated option and one with modulation. All work in stereo for ultimate immersion, but they're plenty big enough through a single amp.

The Pour Over is an envelope filter with added distortion

The Reflecting Pool's three modes offer a decent tonal palette

Those two toggle switches cover a lot of sonic ground, with help from the treble-taming 'damp' control; as long as you're not after old-school spring effects, it's hard to think of a reverb sound that isn't available here. The halls are huge, and for anything less than a full-on ambient wash you'll need to keep the level and decay time low in this mode; but if you do want sheer scale – and especially if you have two amps handy – shimmer offers some bewitchingly intergalactic textures.

The Reflecting Pool's delays are mono, so there's no ping-pong option, but you can still get creative with subdivisions for trippy multi-head effects. The modulation is subtle and natural as long as you keep the depth shy of halfway, while the three delay modes – digital, analogue and tape – offer a decent palette of styles. There's nothing here with the warmth of, say, the Catalinbread Echorec, but the 'quality' switch does allow a certain amount of control over the tonality of the repeats within each mode.

One thing you can't control with this unit, alas, is the background hiss. It's a little louder than we've become used to (the best digital pedals are virtually noise-free these days), and if you set the bypass switch to 'trails' it stays there even when the pedal is switched off. Not a big issue for live use, maybe, but it could be a concern for some in the studio.

Like the first MTG, the 'LA' version uses a tiny 6205 valve running at 150 volts and has been designed in collaboration with famed amp boffin Bruce Egnater. On the surface, the two units look almost identical – with the same footswitchable boost and the same 'tight' control for stopping things getting flubby – but here the mids control has been replaced by one marked simply 'tone', adding more fine-tuning power over the edginess of the distortion.

What certainly hasn't changed is the amount of gain on tap – this is one feisty little box – but it feels less snarly and more gurgly this time. The tightness control doesn't make a big difference to the audible low-end content but does seem to open up a bit more headroom as you crank it; even so, this is a chunky-sounding distortion that generally gets on better with single-coil pickups. Its best sound is arguably with guitar volume backed off a few notches, for a more transparent fluffy-edged tone.

The Trapper is a funny one. This isn't the first fuzzbox of the new Fender stompbox generation – we gave the Pelt a 9/10 review last year – but this time there are two different circuits to flip between, plus the added option of an octave-up effect… so in theory it should be at least twice as much fun. In practice, however, things don't pan out quite as well as that.

We certainly don't have any issues with the first circuit: it's a classic silicon fuzz, throwing out a thick sheet of noise that can be tailored to cover all sorts of extremes using the tone and midrange contour controls. The octave sounds pretty cool as well, as long as you don't mind things taking a turn for the lo-fi.

Switch to the second circuit and you get, in a sense, more of the same – the texture of the fuzz is equally smooth – but now it's fixed at a very high gain level, making this something of a nuclear option. What's more,

KEY FEATURES

REFLECTING POOL
PRICE £259
DESCRIPTION Reverb and delay pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Reverb decay, damping, level and 'extra', hall/room/special and variation 1/2/3 switches; delay time, feedback, mix, level, modulation rate and depth, digital/analogue/tape, 50/66/75% subdivision and quality 1/2/3 switches; reverb bypass, tap tempo and delay bypass footswitches; LEDs on/off and true/trails bypass switches
FEATURES Mono/stereo inputs and outputs, tap footswitch input, USB input for firmware updates; powered by 9-volt mains supply only (not included)
DIMENSIONS 170 x 127 x 62mm
CONTACT fender.com

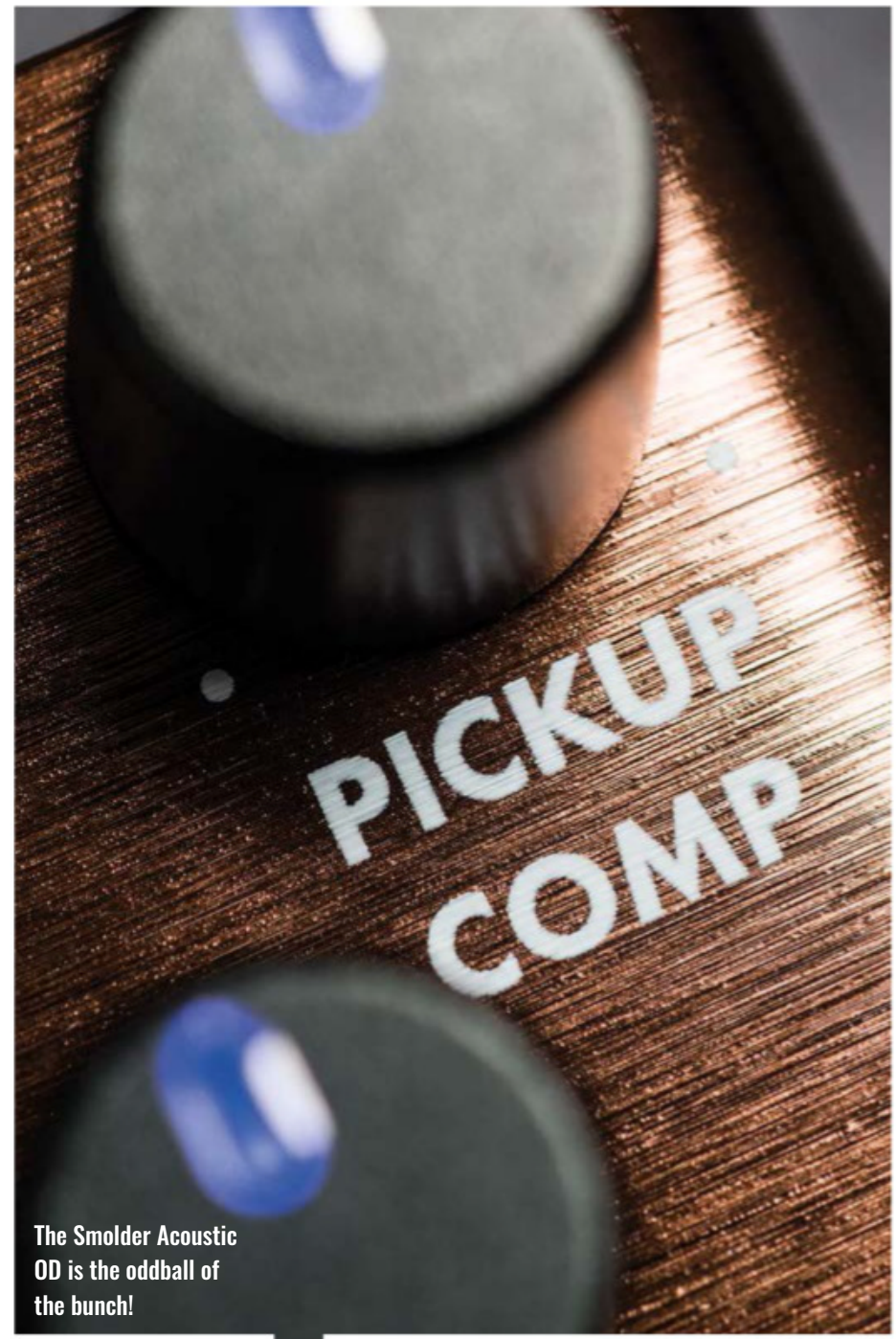
8/10 **A bit hissy, but covers all reverb and delay bases in style**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Keeley Caverns **£179**, EarthQuaker Devices Avalanche Run **£299**, Wampler Ethereal **£229**

there's a gate in operation on this side of the pedal, also fixed, which can create some cool glitchy effects as it clamps down on sustained notes but can also be annoying.

Let's clear our heads with a more straightforward offering. We liked the



The Smolder Acoustic OD is the oddball of the bunch!

KEY FEATURES

MTG:LA
PRICE £159
DESCRIPTION Valve distortion pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Tone, treble, bass, tight, level, gain, boost level and gain; bypass and boost footswitches; LEDs on/off switch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt mains supply only (not included)
DIMENSIONS 127 x 103 x 62mm

7/10 **A meaty overdrive/distortion with a useful boost option**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Seymour Duncan Diamondhead **£249**, Ibanez Tube Screamer Nutube **£139**, T-Rex Moller 2 **£109**

original Pugilist distortion and we also liked the Bends compressor, so what can possibly go wrong when the two of them decide to set up home together in a single pedal? Not much, as it turns out.

It's compressor into distortion, with no option to switch the order around, but independent footswitches a good two inches apart mean it's easy enough to engage either side of the Compugilist without waking the

KEY FEATURES

COMPUGILIST
PRICE £129
DESCRIPTION Distortion and compressor pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Distortion tone, gain, level and bass boost switch; compressor recovery time, compression and level; bypass footswitches; LEDs on/off switch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not included)
DIMENSIONS 127 x 103 x 62mm

8/10 **A two-in-one pedal that represents excellent value**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Keeley Aria **£199**, ThorpyFX The Fat General **£220**, Amptweaker Pressurizer **£199**

other. Most importantly, nothing important has got lost in the process of turning two into one.

The compressor isn't doing anything remarkable, and there are better options if you want flexibility rather than simplicity, but as long as you go easy with the 'comp' dial it'll do a sterling job of taming your loose transients and adding a bit of excitement to clean chords.

All feature LEDs for clearly visible settings

KEY FEATURES

THE TRAPPER
PRICE £129
DESCRIPTION Dual fuzz pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Tone, contour, fuzz 2 level, fuzz 1 level, fuzz and octave switch; bypass and fuzz 1/2 footswitches; LEDs on/off switch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not included)
DIMENSIONS 127 x 103 x 62mm

8/10 **This quirky fuzz is up against some quality competition**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Big Muff Pi **£105**, Orange Fur Coat **£118,** Beetronics Octahive **£239**

KEY FEATURES

SMOLDER ACOUSTIC OD
PRICE £129
DESCRIPTION Acoustic overdrive pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Tone, treble, bass, pickup compensation, level, blend, drive; LEDs on/off switch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not included)
DIMENSIONS 127 x 103 x 62mm

7/10 **Niche, but an interesting option for punk troubadours**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Palmer Acoustic Pocket Amp **£123**, BBE Acoustimax **£149**, Hotone A Station **£129**

KEY FEATURES

POUR OVER ENV FILTER
PRICE £129
DESCRIPTION Envelope filter pedal, made in China
CONTROLS Tone, gain, frequency, Q, level and drive; distortion on/off, high/band/low-pass filter and up/down switches; LEDs on/off switch
FEATURES True bypass; powered by 9-volt battery or mains supply (not included)
DIMENSIONS 127 x 103 x 62mm

7/10 **A nice envelope pedal with a high tweakability quotient**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Electro-Harmonix Q-Tron+ **£139**, Keeley Neutrino **£179**, Walrus Audio Kangra **£179**

The distortion does a fair bit of compressing on its own, along with its principal role of dipping your tone in an acid bath of raucous Rat-like snarl. Whether these two effects really belong together is another matter; but if you're in the market for one of each, this could be a nifty way to save a few quid and some pedalboard space.

Now, could you also be in the market for an acoustic overdrive? Plenty of players have dabbled in distorted acoustics, but we're struggling to think of another pedal designed for that specific purpose. This one is voiced to be sympathetic to acoustic pickups, and unsympathetic to screeching feedback, while its analogue cabinet simulation allows it to be DI'd to a PA or recording interface rather than forcing you to wrestle with an amp.

To be fair, it does the job, adding drive without also adding the usual ear-stabbing howls, and the controls are sensitively judged for filtering out unmusical high frequencies. Its appeal will undoubtedly be niche, but thankfully the blend dial allows you to retain the twinkly attack of your clean sound with the fuzzy stuff mostly just filling out the background. It seems a shame to say it, but that's probably the best way to use this unit.

The last of our six pedals presents no such head-scratchery. It's an envelope-following filter and it sounds exactly as it should. Setting up a basic auto-wah sound is easy enough, but the Pour Over has more knobs and switches than most pedals of its type and scores highly for versatility. Tweaking the frequency, Q and drive to colour the response of the filter is intuitive enough, while the switchable distortion has its own tone and gain knobs and can get pretty gnarly by itself.

There's not much more to say about that one. It's solid, functional and flexible, which makes it a pretty good snapshot of the whole Fender pedal range as we enter 2020. We've a feeling there'll be more than 21 of them by 2021.

FOREVER CLASSIC

'CLASSIC' - *adjective*
judged over a period of time to be of the highest quality and outstanding of its kind.

Timeless Classics From An American Original.

Revered by blues, country and rock players alike, Peavey Classic® Series are true all-tube amps that span the tonal landscape from vintage to contemporary with ease.

BARNES & MULLINS
Multiple Winner of
The UK's 'Best Supplier' Award

PEAVEY
INNOVATION. AMPLIFIED.®

THE SERPENT
FORESTRY

Mistweaver is a relatively new but promising name in pedals

MISTWEAVER EFFECTS
FORESTRY & THE SERPENT

WORDS MICHAEL WATTS

A brace of hand-wired anger boxes from newcomers to the effects scene

Originally starting as hobbyists building pedals for friends, Singapore's Mistweaver Effects will be a new name to most of you. Very new, in fact, with the first units hitting the market as recently as 2018. Since their launch, the brand has garnered an impressive amount of attention from press and players alike, and we were lucky enough to snag an example of both models in their nascent range, the Forestry overdrive and the Serpent fuzz.

Mistweaver pedals come in single berth white enclosures with silk-screened black graphics that straddle the fine line between handmade and homemade. While the monochrome aesthetics are nice enough, it would be really helpful to at least attempt to label the control knobs. As it stands neither pedal willingly gives up the secrets of its inner workings until you consult the manual.

Mistweaver tempts hubris by describing the Forestry overdrive as its "Dumble in a box" – a brave claim from such a young company. However, the use of NOS Soviet-era germanium diodes is encouraging, as is the mini-toggle switch offering both symmetrical and asymmetrical clipping modes. The coquettishly anonymous knobs are revealed to be volume, gain, tone and presence controls which makes sense for an amp-inspired stomp box. Given that a pedal of this nature is going to live or die by its responsiveness to nuances in picking attack and dynamics rather than control complexity, it's an approach we can get behind.

The Serpent eschews the tonehound niceties of its sibling in favour of the beautifully chaotic aggression of a Muff-style circuit. In this case, it's directly inspired by a vintage green Russian Pi but with a couple of tweaks to elevate it above the norm. As expected, a trio of knobs takes care of volume, gain and tone and there is also a mini contour switch which moves between flat, scooped and boosted mids. Delicious. Once again, the identity of each knob is only given on a need to know basis.

IN USE

Plugging in the Forestry with all the controls pointing half-way and the mini toggle switch flipped up to symmetrical overdrive mode unleashes an extremely pokey and present overdrive sound. Part of this is due to the fact that unity gain is at about 30 per cent, meaning that a potentially brutal amount of boost is available through the pedal's volume knob alone allowing for all sorts of amp punishment. Impressively, the Forestry responds very well to the nuances and detail of bare finger playing and it's possible to go from a full clean to a rich overdrive purely by varying the strength of your attack.

Switch to non-clipping mode and the pedal retracts its claws and works more like a clean boost – and a very good one too. As expected, the asymmetric clipping section is more aggressive and ragged than its symmetric sibling. It's still a sophisticated and beautiful sound, though, just dialled up a notch or two.

The Forestry offers plenty of tonal versatility from both the tone and presence knobs going easily from a molten tweed

The Mistweavers feature monochrome silk-screened graphics

amp roar to the sting of a wound-up silverface. Does it sound like a Dumble? Maybe not exactly, but it certainly rivals other pedals vying for your attention in that niche but crowded market. Time to meet The Serpent…

The dedicated Big Muff Pi enthusiast now has a dizzying array of options to choose from, with everyone from EHX to myriad boutique builders offering infinitesimally differing takes on the original pedal designs – the Green Russian flavour is certainly a great place to start for any player dipping their toe in the turbulent waters of Muff for the first time. A Big Muff is best enjoyed with an amp with plenty of midrange and accordingly, we plug into a handwired Vox AC4 and dial it up until it starts to grumble.

The Big Muff is well known for its ability to lay down frightening amounts of girthy fury, from enraged fuzzopotamus to neverending buzzsaw, and the Mistweaver Serpent certainly lives up to the spirit of the original with our first exploratory power chords. Once again, the initial volume of the pedal is something fierce, leading us to set unity gain at around 30 per cent for balance while the familiar Muff roar comes through like an angry bastard. It's thick, throaty and will cheerfully render anything other than powerchords or single note lines into sludge, but it is glorious for soaring bent note solos. It's grippy, expressive and very musical, Just what you want from a good Muff.

The aforementioned contour switch works as advertised when it comes to midrange variations. Scooped mids can be a thing of wonder for the heavier styles and The Serpent kicks out some powerful doomy vibes that will appeal to the more cloven-hoofed guitarist. Boosting the mids takes us straight into desert/stoner rock territory, which makes for a joyful time dusting off our Monster Magnet and Kyuss riffs. While three knobs and a classic Big Muff layout make navigation more instinctive than the Forestry, it would still be nice to have the controls labelled.

One thing we notice as the dust settles is how well these pedals work together. Pushed into each other The Serpent and Forestry make for an impressive double act, with both pedals working very well as part of a cascading gain stage set-up. Pedals that complement each other is always good.

Looking at the evolution of other companies such as JAM pedals and Z.Vex from their hand-painted, made-in-a-bedroom origins to their current status as world straddling overlords of Planet Tone makes us feel that the future for Mistweaver pedals could certainly be bright.

Ok, the graphics are a bit sophomoric but there is no arguing with the sounds on offer. There are a lot of shoutier companies in this marketplace, but in producing this pair of great-sounding pedals for their opening gambit, Mistweaver has got the hard part right. We look forward to seeing what the company comes up with next! G

KEY FEATURES

FORESTRY
PRICE $155
DESCRIPTION Overdrive pedal, made in Singapore
CONTROLS Volume, gain, tone, presence, mini-toggle switch, on/off footswitch
FEATURES Symmetrical and asymmetrical clipping options. 1% metal film resistors. WIMA box film capacitors. Burr Brown op-amp IC chip. True-bypass switching. 9V DC mains power only
DIMENSIONS 38mm x 65mm x 120mm

8/10 **A hot-headed take on the Dumble theme which rivals many of the bigger-name alternatives**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Vemuram Jan Ray **£339**, Hermida (LovePedal) Zen Drive **£239**, MXR Custom Shop Raijin Drive **£140**

KEY FEATURES

THE SERPENT
PRICE $140
DESCRIPTION Fuzz pedal, made in Singapore
CONTROLS Volume, gain, tone, contour toggle switch
FEATURES Mid scoop, Mid boost voicings. 1% metal film resistors. WIMA box film capacitors. True-bypass switching. 9V DC mains power only
DIMENSIONS 38mm x 65mm x 120mm
CONTACT mistweaverfx.com

8/10 **An excellent choice for the Big Muff enthusiast looking for midrange versatility**

LIKE THIS? TRY THESE...

Wren And Cuff Tall Font Russian **£200**, Jam Pedals Red Muck **£169**, EHX Green Russian Big Muff distortion **£75**

Ever dreamed of building YOUR ULTIMATE CUSTOM GUITAR?

This year we've asked some of our favourite builders to help us make that dream a reality

visit www.theguitarshow.co.uk to follow the build and have your say

Voted for by you,
Built by them.
Given away by us to
ONE LUCKY WINNER!

CRIMSON · HJ Williams guitars · OIL CITY PICKUPS · Grainger GUITARS

THE GUITAR SHOW 20

Bingley Hall, Birmingham

Feb 29th - Mar 1st

fano
Alt de Facto SP6

DIY WORKSHOP

HOW TO HANG YOUR GUITARS ON THE WALL THE RIGHT WAY

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY GUITAR.COM

Want to have a wall full of your favourite guitars without that nagging worry that they're going to fall off? Our step-by-step guide will help you on your way…

Guitars are great, *obviously*, but they tend to get in the way, don't they? Unless you've got a palatial home studio set-up, having all your guitars out on stands is both messy, cluttered, and an accident waiting to happen – we all remember Domino Rally, right?

But what's the alternative? Well, you could just keep your guitars in their cases – there's no doubt that a case is almost always the safest and best place to store your guitars when you aren't using them. But it's also a bit of a hassle, isn't it?

So many of us struggle to find the time to play guitar as much as we'd like these days, do we really want to cut into that time with extra admin every time we play? And if inspiration strikes, do we really want to have to go under the bed or into the cupboard to get the guitar we want to play, and risk the moment passing? Exactly.

If we agree that having your guitars close at hand is both handy and useful, but that having them all on stands takes up too much space, what's the answer? Yes, friends, the answer is wall-hangers – not only does having your guitars on the wall save space and keeps them safe from accidental knocking over, but it allows you to display your beautiful instruments in an unquestionably rock 'n' roll way.

But it's a bit scary, isn't it? The thought of a few screws being all that stands between your guitar and a six-foot drop onto a hard floor… *shudder*. But don't be afraid, we can show you how to ensure your guitars are safe and secure on the wall…

STEP 1

THE RIGHT TOOLS FOR THE JOB

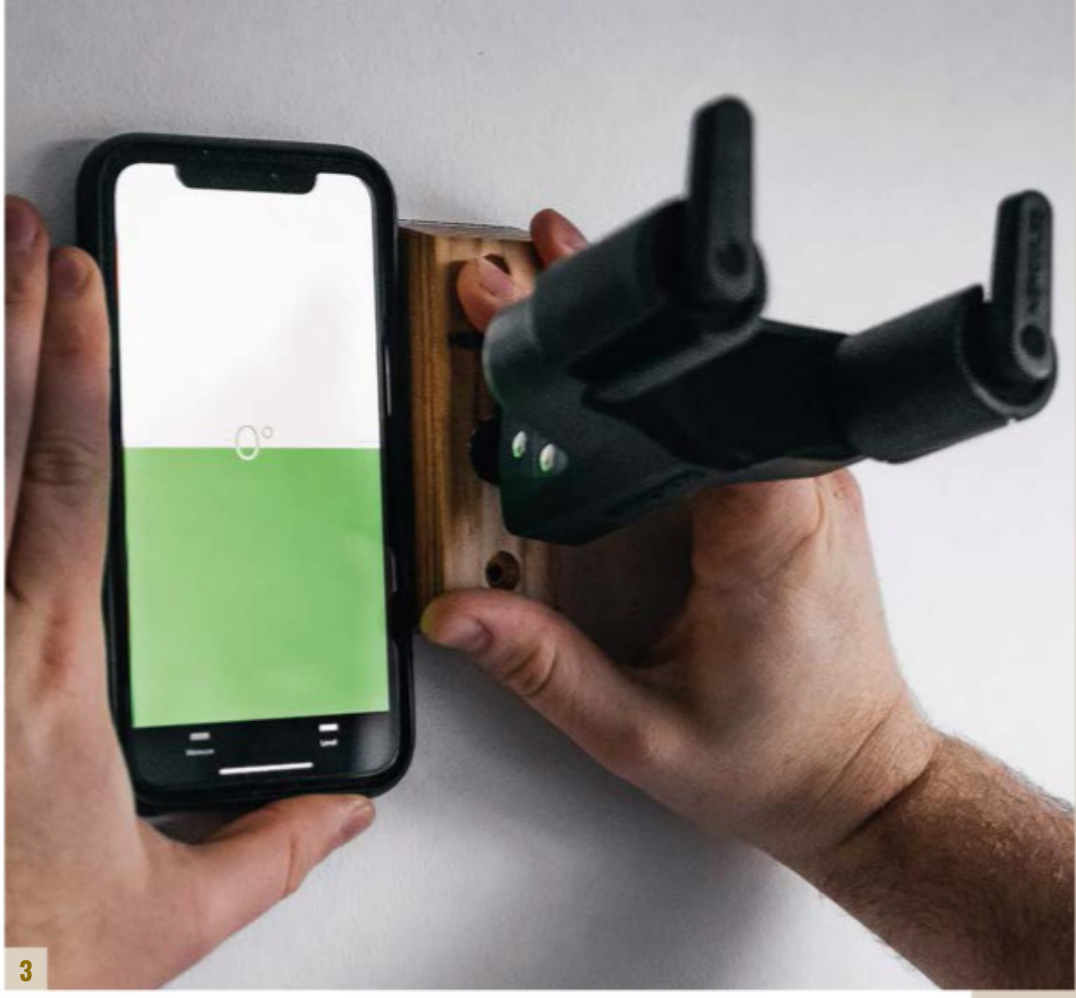
You (hopefully) wouldn't transport your Custom Shop Strat in one of those flimsy gigbags that you get with the cheapest student guitars, so why are you trying to cut corners when you're suspending it in the air?

If you're going to do this, do it *right* – get yourself a quality hanger from a reputable manufacturer. We've chosen to use the Hercules GSP38WB Plus for our guide because of the extra reassurance that comes with the Auto Grip System (AGS) widely seen on its popular guitar stands. The AGS is a clever bit of engineering, which grips and locks the neck of the guitar into the hanger when you put it in place, meaning that there's no chance your guitar will get knocked and slip off the hanger.

PARTS LIST

- Wall hanger
- Mounting screws and plugs
- Tape measure
- Spirit level
- Pencil
- Hammer drill
- Hammer
- Screwdriver

1



3

2

If you want more reassurance that it's going to hang solidly on the wall, Hercules offers the GSP38 with a three-screw metal backplate, but for most guitars and walls, the two-screw wood block will be fine. Of course there are loads of wall-hanger options out there depending on your taste and preference, so pick the one that's best for your needs.

STEP 2
CHOOSE THE RIGHT WALL

This is perhaps the most important part of this whole process – choosing the correct wall to hang your instruments on. By far the most straightforward and reassuring option is to hang the guitar into a solid masonry wall. Not sure if your wall is solid? Give it a firm tap – if it sounds in any way hollow, you should look elsewhere if possible. For most modern brick/cinderblock houses, an external wall is probably your best bet here.

If you don't have access to a solid wall, however, that doesn't mean your dream of guitar-hanging nirvana is over. There are ways to hang heavy objects on plasterboard/drywall, but it does complicate matters.

If your wall is fairly sturdy, simply pop to your local hardware/DIY store for some hollow wall anchors – these come in various different configurations, but given that these anchors are often designed to hold flat-screen TVs on walls, they should be more than sufficient. Our best advice is to ask in-store, and be sure to double-check that the bolts for the anchors are small enough to get through the holes in your hangers, or you'll be taking them back quick smart.

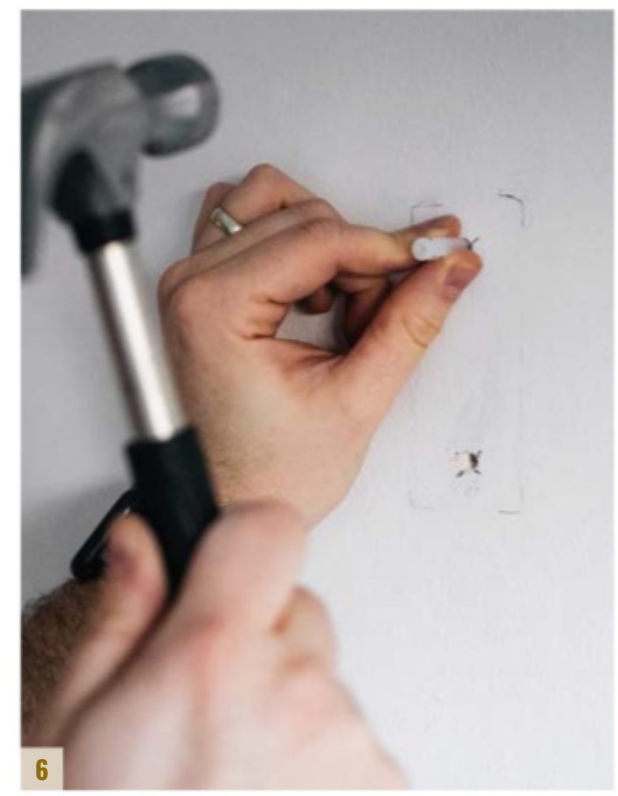
Alternatively, you could drill directly into the wooden wall stud, but you'll need to find one first. To do this, you'll need to get yourself an electronic stud finder – a clever gizmo that you can pick up for under £15. If you're drilling into the plasterboard, you'll need one of these anyway for safety reasons to ensure that there's no pipework or wiring near the area in which you're drilling.

STEP 3
PREPARE YOURSELF

For the sake of simplicity, we've chosen to mount our hanger on a solid external wall. The most important part of the prep is deciding where you want the hanger to go, and ensuring that it will allow the instrument to hang unencumbered – you might need an assistant to help you with this part.

4

5



6

To do this, take your guitar and place it face down on a soft surface, then take the hanger and hook it into place around the headstock. Holding the hanger in place, measure the distance from the top of the mounting block to the very bottom of the guitar – this will let you know the minimum clearance you'll need on your walls to mount the instrument **[1]**.

Place the hanger where you want it on the wall make a small pencil mark at the top of the mounting block **[2]**, and then measure the same distance down the wall. This is to make sure that nothing in between is going to get in the way of the guitar – watch out for furniture, mouldings, plug sockets… you don't want anything that would stop the guitar hanging straight and true.

Next, you'll need to double-check that there's nothing potentially deadly or ruinous in the wall itself – this is unlikely in an exterior wall, but to be on the safe side we turn to our old friend the stud finder to ensure that everything under the surface is solid and safe.

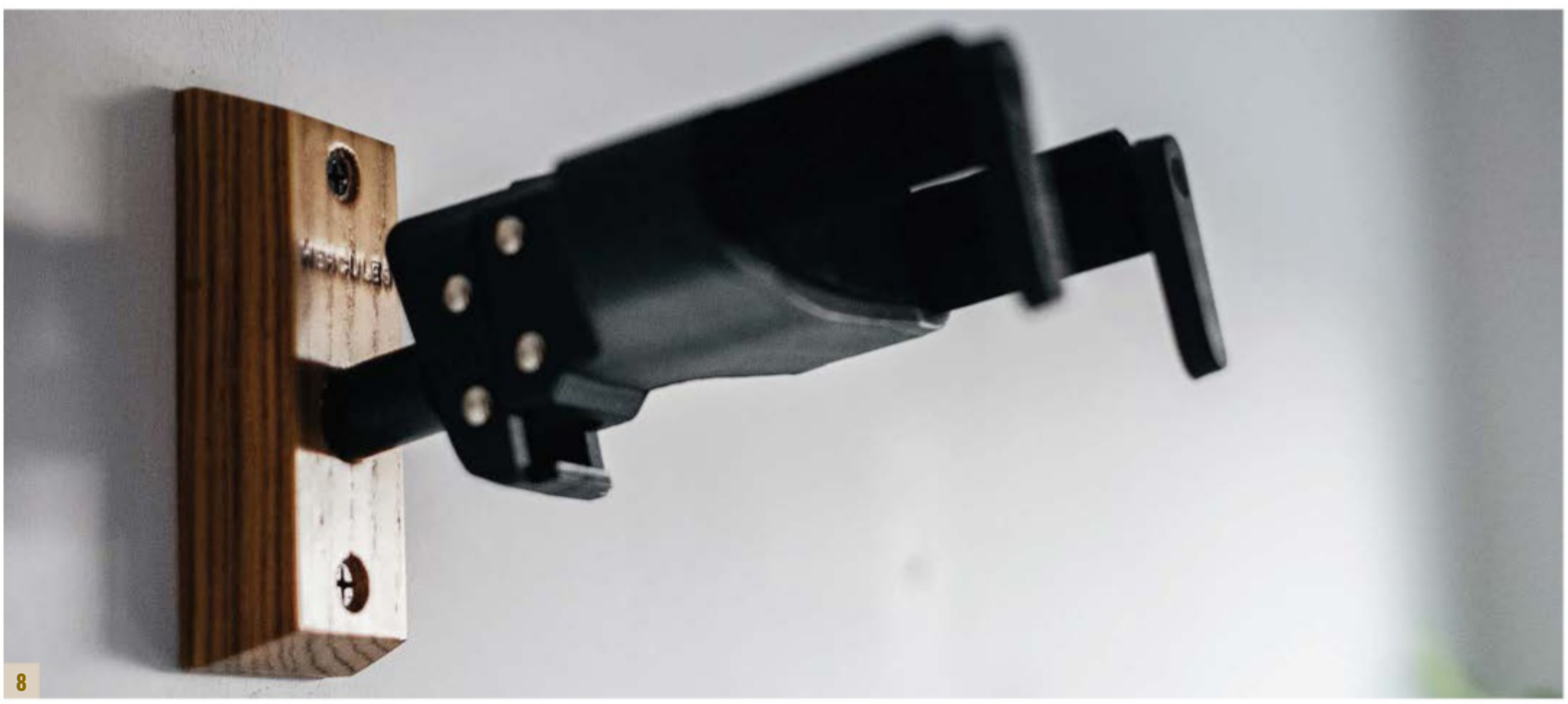
STEP 4

GET THE TOOLS OUT

Now for the fun part – power tools! If you're drilling into masonry, you'll need a hammer drill (an electric screwdriver won't cut the mustard here) and the appropriate drill bits for the material you're drilling into. Our Hercules hanger helpfully comes with the screws and plugs we'll need to mount it on a solid wall.

First up, place your hanger on the wall and line up a spirit level against the hanging block – we just used our phone's built-in level app and it does the job perfectly well **[3]**. Next, mark the edges of the block with your pencil and also mark where the screw

7


8

holes are. Take the block away and you should be left with a pretty clear indication of where you'll need to drill.

Next, select a drill bit that corresponds with the width of your plug **[4]**, and drill the holes required for the screws – you don't need to go too deep, just as deep as the length of plug you're using **[5]**. Once the holes are drilled, gently tap the plugs into place with a hammer **[6]**. If they're really struggling to go in, try re-drilling the hole with a slightly larger bit, but don't try to force it as you'll wreck the plug.

STEP 5

LET'S GET IT ON

Now for the simple bit – presuming that everything has gone to plan, you just need to position the hanger in place and carefully screw it into the wall, ensuring that the screws go through the hanger and into the end of the plugs **[7]**.

Keep tightening the screws until the hanger block is flush and tight to the wall, and once you feel you can't go any further, give the hanger a gentle tug down to make sure that the screws and plugs are all holding firmly in place **[8]**.

STEP 6

THE MOMENT OF TRUTH

Finally, we get to the scary part – testing it out. Provided that you've followed all the steps properly and fixed the hanger securely, it's time to test this thing. Take one of your guitars and pop it onto the hanger… take a deep breath, step back and if everything is as it should be, the guitar should hang securely in place **[9]**.

Leave it for a minute or two and then remove the guitar again, inspect the hanger to make sure that it hasn't come away from the wall at all and everything is still solid and sturdy – if it is, you're done!

One thing before we leave you to admire your handiwork – some players have reported truss-rod issues with guitars left on the wall for too long, so if you notice this, it might make sense to keep your in-use guitar on a stand and rotate the guitars on your wall every so often.

Equally, if like us you've gone for a Hercules hanger and have kids, pets or clumsy friends, it might also worth investing in a bit of extra peace of mind by buying the aforementioned AGS Lock – it works on either stands or hangers with the AGS system and fully locks the guitar in place, meaning the guitar can't be removed from its hanger without a key.

Congratulations, you now have a place to hang your guitar on your wall – revel in the floor space that you've saved and the fact that you can now display your beautiful guitar like the work of art it is!

It also goes without saying that we cannot take responsibility if something goes wrong in the process – if you're in any doubt, or anything seems wrong, stop and get a professional in. It's not worth risking your beloved guitar if your DIY skills aren't up to snuff. Good luck! G

9

14

15

CRIMSON
Luthiery School

2 WEEK GUITAR BUILDING COURSES

Prices start at £1,595

Learn to build in our bespoke Student Workshop in the heart of Dorset.

Your journey to becoming a Luthier starts here.

For more information:
crimsonguitars.com
01300 348863

Fender
Fender
VOL
VOL
TONE
TONE

TECH TALK

HARDTAIL HEARTACHE

WORDS & PHOTOGRAPHY MICHAEL JAMES ADAMS

In the first instalment of a new column, Michael James Adams finds that an abrasive approach can yield positive results when dealing with a tricky string breakage issue…

If there's anything that keeps me motivated to post my work on Instagram, it's the belief that any guitar player, regardless of skill level, can become at least partially self-sufficient when it comes to guitar maintenance. Whether it's basic stuff like stringing a guitar properly or more complicated procedures such as swapping pickups or intonation adjustment, I really do believe that with a bit of practice and patience, anyone can learn to do what we techs do.

When asked if I'd be interested in a column in which I share some of the tips, tricks, and tried and true tools of the trade, I said yes immediately. Anything I can do to disseminate what I've learned over my many years as a guitar doctor is a win for me, and if it encourages someone else out there to take a more proactive approach toward the care of their beloved instrument, then I'm happy.

In this inaugural instalment of the column, I'm going to tell you about a sparkly Telecaster plagued with string breakage issues, as well as the one tool that helped alleviate those problems.

BREAKING BAD

My dear friend David Sauer from the alternative pop-punk project One High Five has a beautiful Telecaster Deluxe that captures my imagination every time I see him throw it around his neck. Of course he's a fantastic player and captivating in his own right, but anyone who knows me knows that sparkle finishes are my greatest weakness; last time I owned a 90s Fender Super-Sonic, I'd lose hours just staring at it like a raccoon caught in a foil trap.

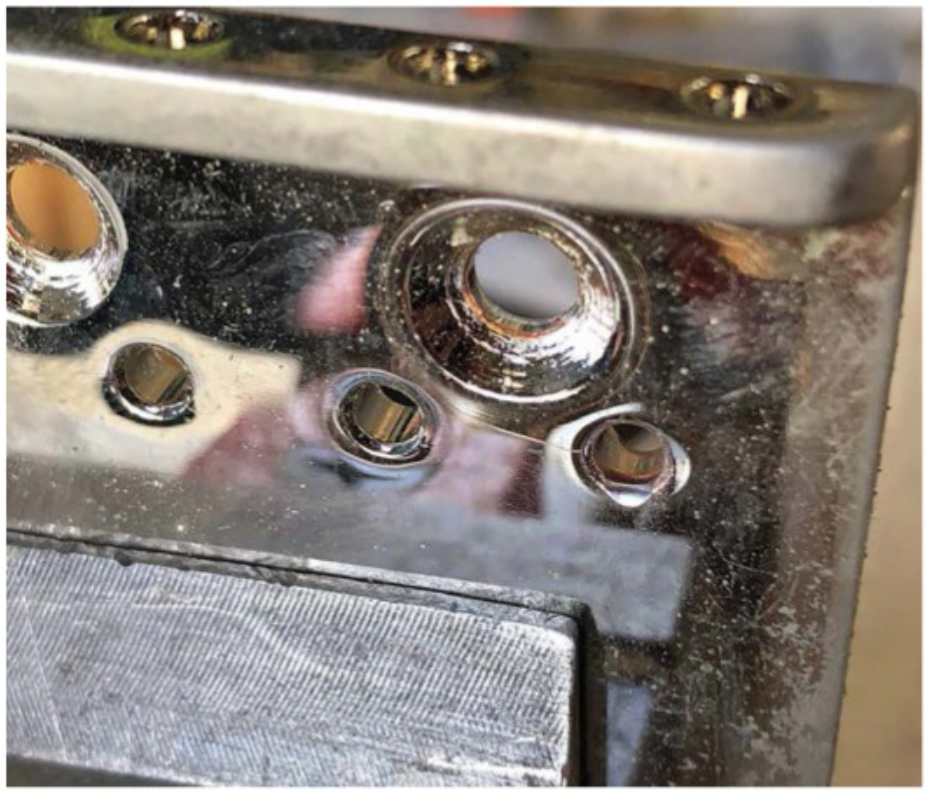
A great as that guitar played and sounded, it seemed cursed with broken strings at nearly every performance. At first, David suspected it had something to do with the vintage-style saddles that came stock on the guitar, so he replaced the bridge with the more modern American Standard part. This seemed to help… at least for a little while.

But soon enough, the problem crept up again during energetic shows, where six strings would turn to five, and sometimes fewer. Ever the glass-half-full sort of fellow, he'd merrily restring post-show and chalk it up to a flaw in his technique. Knowing it couldn't be his heavy right hand alone, I asked him to keep an eye on where the strings were breaking and bring it to me the next time it happened.

Just before a two-week long autumn tour, David showed up with the guitar and a fresh pack of strings in tow. He was worried about the upcoming dates, admitting that he wasn't sure he could trust his Tele on the road. Luckily, he'd been taking note of where the strings broke, and just as I suspected, it was happening *behind* the saddles. For any guitar tech worth their salt, this was a major development.

TAKE IT TO THE BRIDGE

On the majority of hard-tail bridges, the strings are installed from the back of the guitar, routed through the body and exit via holes in the bridge base-plate, where they meet the saddles and continue on to



ABOVE The Telecaster bridge's base plate holes had sharp, squared-off edges, but this can be remedied using Mitchell's Abrasive Cord

RIGHT Behind the saddle string breakages can be common on Teles with hardtails and offsets alike – especially if you play behind the bridge on Jazzmaster-style guitars

the fretboard, nut, and tuners. Because the strings were breaking behind the saddles, it was easy to rule out other possible offenders and focus on those base-plate holes.

I could immediately see the problem after removing the Tele's bridge: those holes had sharp, squared-off edges, and in some cases, what appeared to be leftover chrome from the building process. This left these points of contact particularly dangerous for string longevity and required redressing.

GET ABRASIVE

How to handle such an issue? Allow me to introduce you to one of my favourite well-kept secrets: Mitchell's Abrasive Cord. This is like coarse-grit sandpaper on a string, which allows you to shave off rough edges in tight spaces. It comes in a range of sizes, so it's perfect for smoothing out worn saddle slots, deburring vibrato string anchors, rounding over poorly-honed nut slots, cleaning off corrosion from underneath a string tree, or as in this case, softening sharp points of contact in the strings' path.

For this job, I removed the saddles and clamped the base plate in my smallest vice, threaded the appropriate size of cord through the first string-thru hole, and polished by hand in a manner not unlike flossing one's teeth. It only takes a few moments to achieve round, smooth edges. I repeated the process for each hole, then reinstalled the bridge and strung up.

During play testing, the strings held tune well and didn't show signs of snapping, but realistically this is the kind of job where you just won't know how well it all worked out until the player puts the guitar through its paces. I made a note to check in with David mid-tour, and to our mutual delight he hasn't had a string break since. I'd call that a job well done.

Abrasive Cord can be found at a number of woodworking and luthiery suppliers such as Stewart-MacDonald, Gesswein and Rothko & Frost, as well as certain machine and automotive suppliers. And while you're surfing the web, give One High Five a listen. They play wild, sometimes chaotic party-punk music with an infectious positivity that might just lift your spirits on a gloomy day… G

For plenty more where this came from, follow Mike on Instagram: @puisheen

SOUNDPAD

Tel 01271 323686 | **www.soundpad.co.uk** | **info@soundpad.co.uk**

SINCE 1972 — **Service Second to None**
Online & Instore

Next Working Day Delivery
Available in the UK

Take it away — **Finance Available**
Call for more details

THE PLAYER SERIES

PLAYER TELECASTER
- Butterscotch Blonde
- Maple Fingerboard
- Alder Body
- Dual Single Coil Pickups
- 9.5” Radius Fingerboard

**Other colours available*

£529

PLAYER STRATOCASTER
- 3 Colour Sunburst
- Pau Ferro Fingerboard
- Alder Body
- 2 point tremolo bridge
- 9.5” Radius Fingerboard

**Other colours available*

£529

PLAYER JAGUAR
- Sage Green Metallic
- Pau Ferro Fingerboard
- Alder Body
- Humbucking Pickups w/ Push/Pull Coil Split
- 9.5” Radius Fingerboard

**Other colours available*

£560

electro-harmonix

For Guitar

B9 ORGAN MACHINE
9 presets tuned to emulate the most legendary traditional organs

£205

C9 ORGAN MACHINE
9 presets tuned to emulate the most legendary Tonewheel organs

£205

POG2 OCTAVE
Polyphonic Octave Generator. 4 mixable voices.

£299

More pedals in stock online & instore..

Recent arrivals..

NEW **£899**

Fender MIJ Daybreak Stratocaster
Limited Edition. Made in Japan. Finished in Olympic White with Gold Hardware & Matching headstock. Includes Padded Gig Bag.

NEW **£1,499**

Fender American Original 50s Tele
Ash Body. Pure Vintage 52 Pickups. Thick U Shaped Neck. Vintage Style Hardware. Includes Vintage Style Hard Case.

NEW **£1,689**

Fender American Elite Stratocaster
Finished in Aged Cherry Burst. Maple Neck. S1 Switching. Compound Profile Neck. Locking Machine Heads. Includes Hard Case.

NEW **£1,399**

Fender American Pro Telecaster Dlx
Finished in Sonic Grey. Tim Shaw Designed Humbucking pickups with Treble Bleed. Modern Deep C Neck. Includes Hard Case.

PRE-OWNED **£2,899**

Taylor 814CE Grand Auditorium
Circa 2011. Made in El Cajon, USA. Rare Sunburst Finish. Spruce Top. Rosewood Back & Sides. Expression Pickup. Hard Case & Docs.

PRE-OWNED **£1,499**

Taylor 412e Grand Concert
Solid Sitka Spruce Top. Solid Ovangkol Back & Sides. Built in Taylor Expression 2 Pickup System. With Original Hard Case and Docs.

PRE-OWNED **£1,999**

Taylor 524e Grand Auditorium
All Mahogany. Built in Expression 2 Pickup System. Made from Tropical Mahogany. Ebony Fingerboard. Original hardcase & docs.

NEW **£2,499**

Martin USA GPCA1 Plus
Performing Artist Grand Performance. East Indian Rosewood Back & Sides. Solid Spruce Top. Built in Fishman F1 Pickup. Hard Case.

NEW **£2,379**

Rickenbacker 4003 (Fireglo)
Brand New. 2019 Model. A classic Ricki Design. Rosewood fingerboard. Maple Body with through neck. Includes Hard Case.

NEW **£2,359**

Rickenbacker 4003 (Midnight Blue)
Brand New. A classic Ricki Design. 20 Frets. Rosewood fingerboard. Maple Body with through neck. Includes Hard Case.

PRE-OWNED **£1,499**

Fender Victor Bailey Jazz Bass
Circa 2003. Koa & Rosewood over Mahogany Body. Rosewood Fingerboard. Fender SCN Pickups with Active EQ. Includes Hard Case.

PRE-OWNED **£999**

G&L USA JB-2 J Style Bass
Finished in 3-Tone Sunburst. Made in the USA. Dual Single Coil pickups. Good condition. Includes Hard Case. Photos Online.

PRE-OWNED **£1,199**

Marshall Super Lead 1959 MKII
Circa 1993. Mk2 Re-issue. 100 Watts. 4x EL34 & 3x ECC83 Valves. Fantastic Condition. A classic tone and amplifier.

NEW **£599**

Fender Blues Junior Laquered Tweed
Limited Edition Combo Valve Amplifier. 15 Watts. 1x12” Jenson Speaker. Spring Reverb. EL84 & 12AX7 Valves.

PRE-OWNED **£599**

Cornell Plexi 7 Combo 1x10”
7 Watts. 1x10” Celestion Speaker. 1x EL84 & 2x ECC83 Valves. Pine Shell. Volume, Bass, Treble, EQ & Power Reduction Controls.

NEW **£399**

Vox AC4C1-12 Limited Edition
Finished in Limited Edition Maroon Bronco. All Valve 4 Watts. 1x12” Speaker. Classic Vox tone and design.

Soundpad Ltd. Units 1&2, Rolle Quay House, Rolle Quay, Barnstaple, North Devon. EX31 1JE.
Opening Times: Mon-Sat: 9.30am - 5.30pm. **Sunday:** Closed

All pre-owned Instruments and Equipment carry full 3 months warranty (parts & labour). All prices include VAT.

Master meets student:
Buddy Guy shows Eric
Clapton how it's done, 1969

© David Redfern / Redferns • Getty Images

ESSENTIAL BLUES LESSONS

PART 14 THE MINOR PENTATONIC SCALE, SHAPES 4 & 5

WORDS LEIGH FUGE

We round-up our year-long exploration of the building blocks of blues guitar by finishing off the five basic shapes of the minor pentatonic scale…

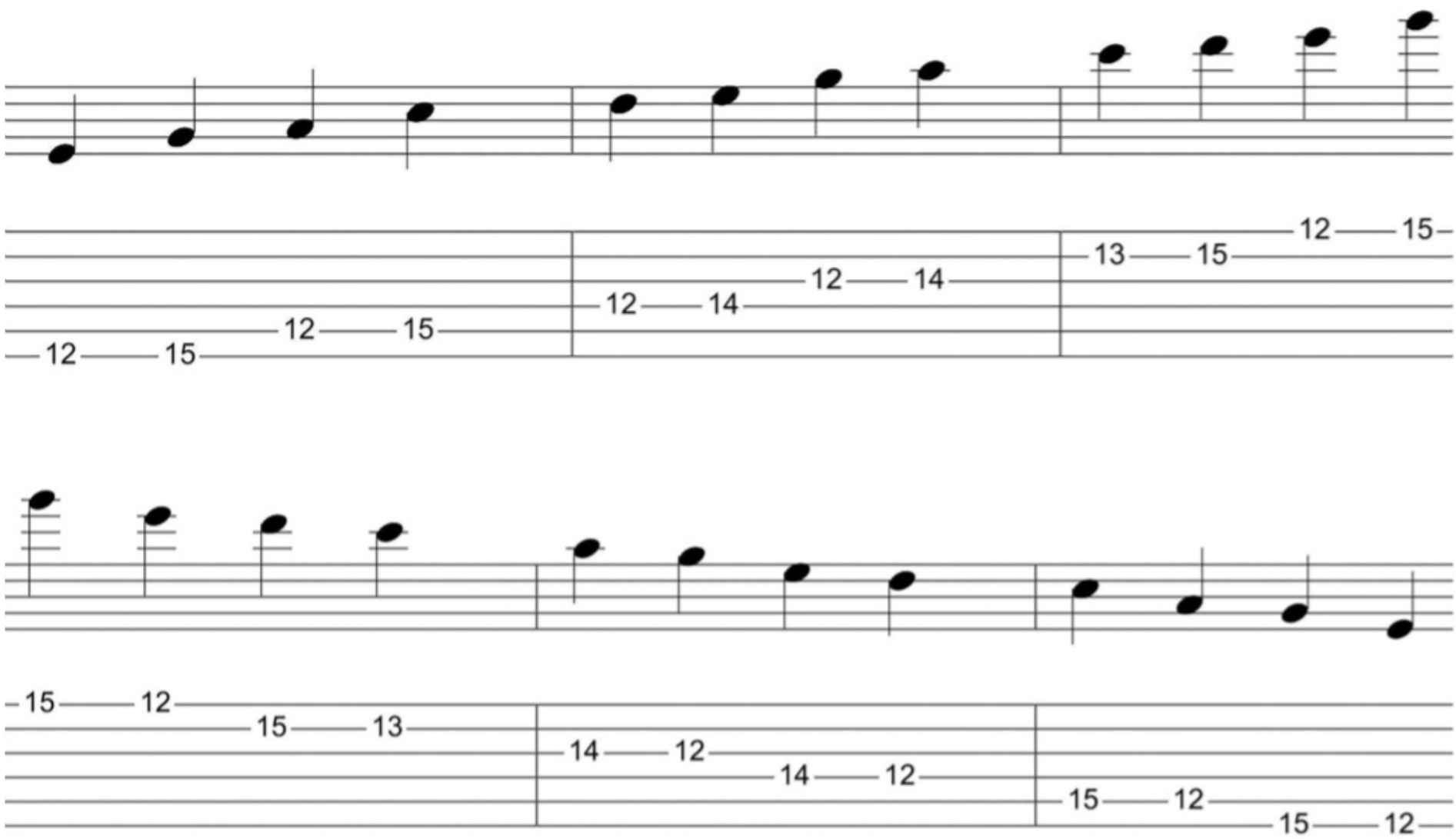
Over the course of the last few months, we've gradually been piecing together the shapes of the minor pentatonic scale. In this lesson, we'll cover the final two shapes in one bumper session and then we can dig into some very exciting playing topics. The final two shapes will give you an entire octave of the fretboard to cover with a scale shape. This will then allow us to really start digging into some creative playing with these scale shapes, and to find what patterns we can place in different fretboard registers.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Leigh Fuge is a guitar teacher and professional musician from Swansea in the UK. Leigh has taught hundreds of students face-to-face and via the MGR Music platform. He also has over 10 years of experience working in the industry as a touring musician and session guitarist.
Find out more at mgrmusic.com

EXAMPLE 1

First up, we're going to look at the fourth shape of the scale, and in the key of A minor that means we'll start at the 12th fret from the E note, which is the fourth note in our pentatonic scale. Practise the shape in ascending and descending fashion until you really get it under your fingers.



EXAMPLE 2

To conclude our exploration of the minor pentatonic scale, here's the fifth and final shape. There's, of course, a nice symmetry in all this, as you'll notice that the highest notes of this shape also become the lowest notes of our first shape. This means once we hit the 17th fret, we can transition back into our first shape again one octave higher. This also means, from our first shape at the fifth fret position, we can also find a fifth shape lower than it, starting on the third fret.

TRY IT YOURSELF

Now that we've covered the five shapes that the minor pentatonic scale has to offer, you can revisit the idea of playing them in different keys. You'll notice that depending on where you put your first scale shape, this will have a knock-on effect on how the other shapes join up.

Sometimes you'll be forced to work backwards to hit some of the shapes because you won't have enough fretboard to run all the way up the neck. This is a great way to learn your way around the fretboard in different keys if you have not already done so.

If you have enjoyed this lesson and you're looking for a guitar teacher in your local area, check mgrmusic.com, and speak to one of our highly recommended teachers.

Next time, we'll take the concepts we've covered in the last few issues and start to build them into some exciting licks in the style of famous guitar players. By learning from the greats you'll expand your vocabulary and make your guitar really sing.

Guitar MAGAZINE MARKETPLACE

To advertise, contact **advertise@guitar.com**

Beginner to Boutique
One to One Service
Sensibly Priced
High Quality Used Guitars
Honesty and Integrity

Austin Guitars

Based in Kirkby, Liverpool, is a family run business dedicated to the provision of top quality new and used guitars.

Check out our latest arrivals at:
www.austinguitars.co.uk

Or email:
sales@austinguitars.co.uk

Keep up to date, follow us on Twitter:
@austinguitarsuk

Fast delivery nationwide

Showroom available by appointment

If you are looking to **buy, sell or trade** get in touch
0151 374 2459
07730 409 841

ALLPARTS (UK)

The UK's premier guitar, bass and amp parts supplier

Quality parts
for quality players

...bridges, necks, bodies, electronics, frets, inlay dots, pickups, knobs, switches, pickguards, tools scratchplates, strings, screws, nuts, saddles, tailpieces ...and much more!!!

Buy online at:
www.allparts.uk.com

Or call us on:
0800 849 8224 / 01494 410050

ABM, Bartolini, Bigsby, CRL, CTS, Danelectro, Earvana, Fender, Gotoh, Graphtech, Grover, Hipshot, Hofner, Dunlop, Oak Grigsby, Omega, Q-Parts, Razor, Schaller, Sperzel, Sprague, Switchcraft, Tremol-No, Tritan, Vibramate and Wilkinson.

ADVERTISE HERE!
advertise@guitar.com

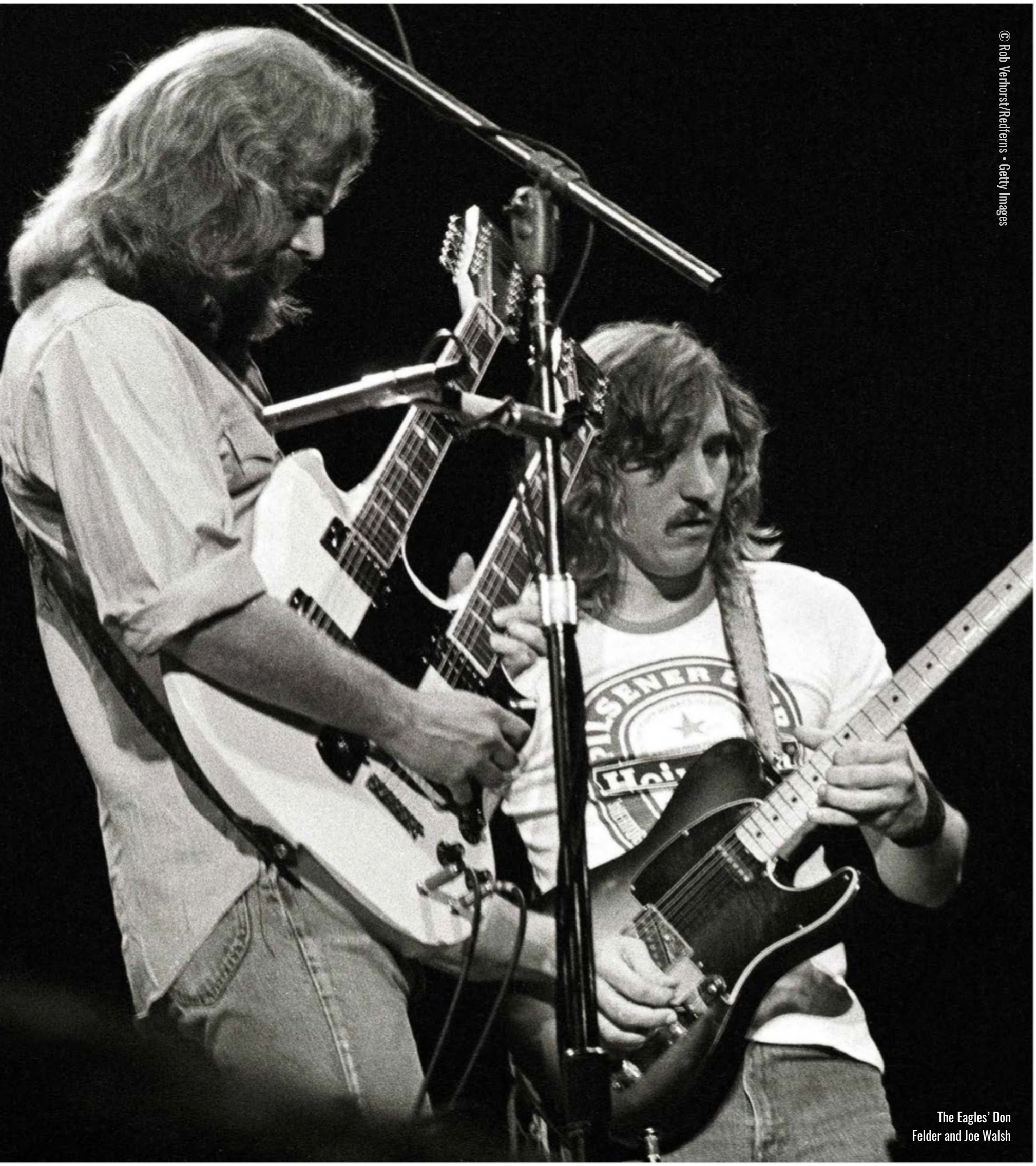
Rob Williams
Custom Guitars

Professional guitar building
Repairs & Restorations

30 years of experience
at your service.

Newtown, Powys
Mid Wales
Tel; 01686 689120

www.robwilliamsguitars.co.uk
www.facebook.com/robwilliamsguitars



The Eagles' Don Felder and Joe Walsh

CHORD CLINIC

HOW TO PLAY CHORDS LIKE THE EAGLES

WORDS ROD FOGG

Throughout their long and incredibly successful career, the Eagles have shifted a staggering 150 million albums – and you don't do that without knowing a thing or two about writing a compelling chord progression…

Though saddled with the 'country rock' tag from the start, the Eagles' music was never one-dimensional and their ability to grab a chord sequence by its cowboy boots and drag it across the border to pop/rock is beyond dispute. In this lesson, we take a look at a piano-inspired four-bar sequence and find different ways to voice the chords on the guitar.

FIGURE 1 MELODIC INTRO

We' ve chosen voicings for these chords that allow melody notes to be added on the top string. For example, in the first chord, the fourth finger can be released from the fifth string and sounded on the top string at the 10th fret.

In the second chord, it can be released from the top string so that you can again sound the 10th fret, which will be held down by the barre. For the C major chord, the top two notes can be your melody, while finger four can be released on the C minor sixth chord and the G note (third fret) sounded.

For the best effect, try playing these chords fingerstyle, using your thumb on the lowest note and the first three fingers of your picking hand (index, middle and ring) to play the rest of the notes.

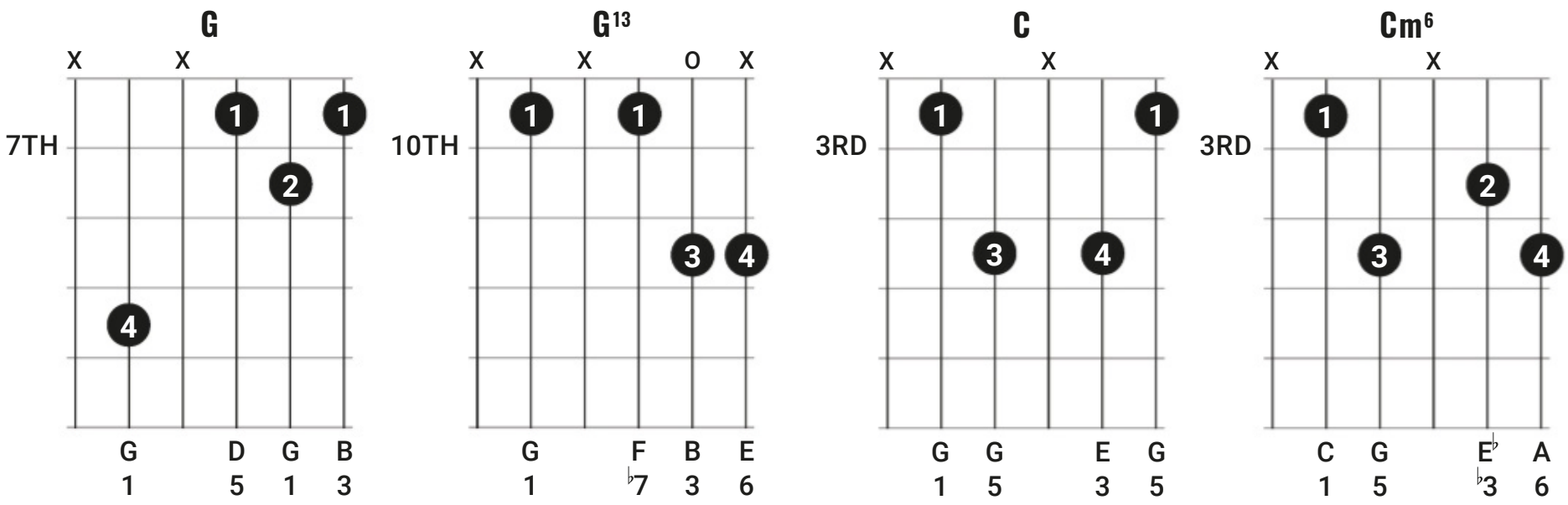


FIGURE 2 MELODY WITH LOW VOICINGS

It' s definitely easier to play chords and add melody notes when you have the higher voicings from Figure 1. Nevertheless, here we carry on in the same way, and add notes to shapes which are based on those good ol' open string cowboy chords. Finger four can be added on the B string to play the note D over the G major chord, and then alternate between the top two notes of the Em7 chord.

On the A9 chord, drop finger three on the second fret of the G string to add the note A and then play the D major chord straight and let it ring – with a meaningful pause.

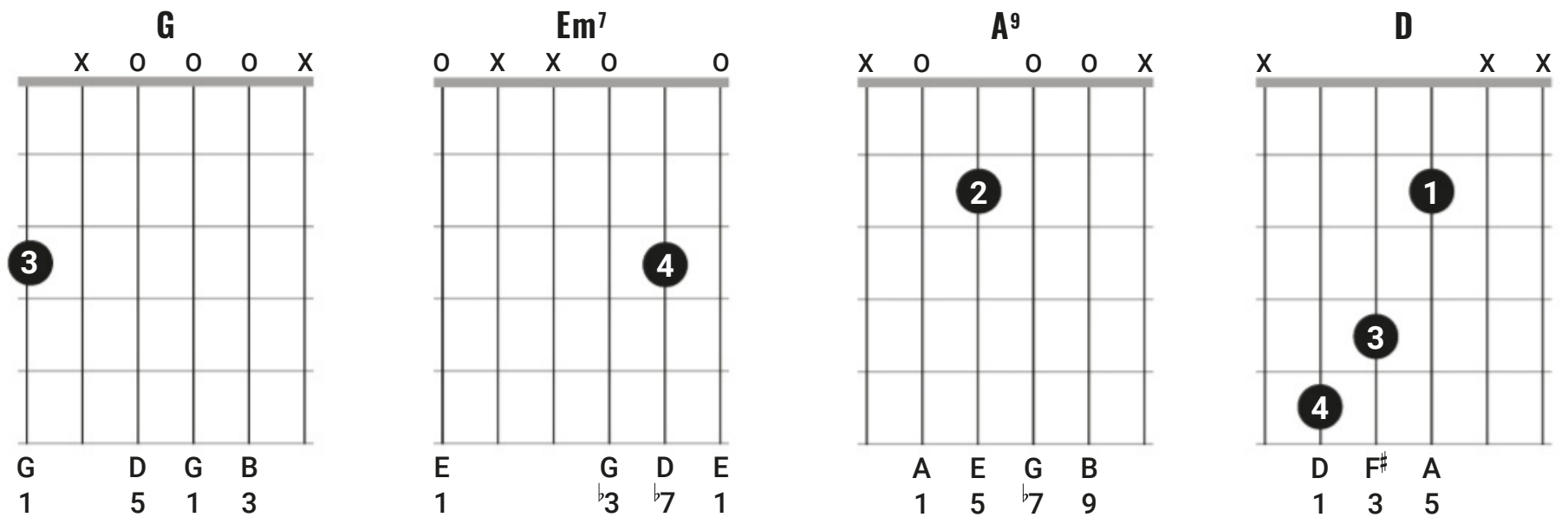


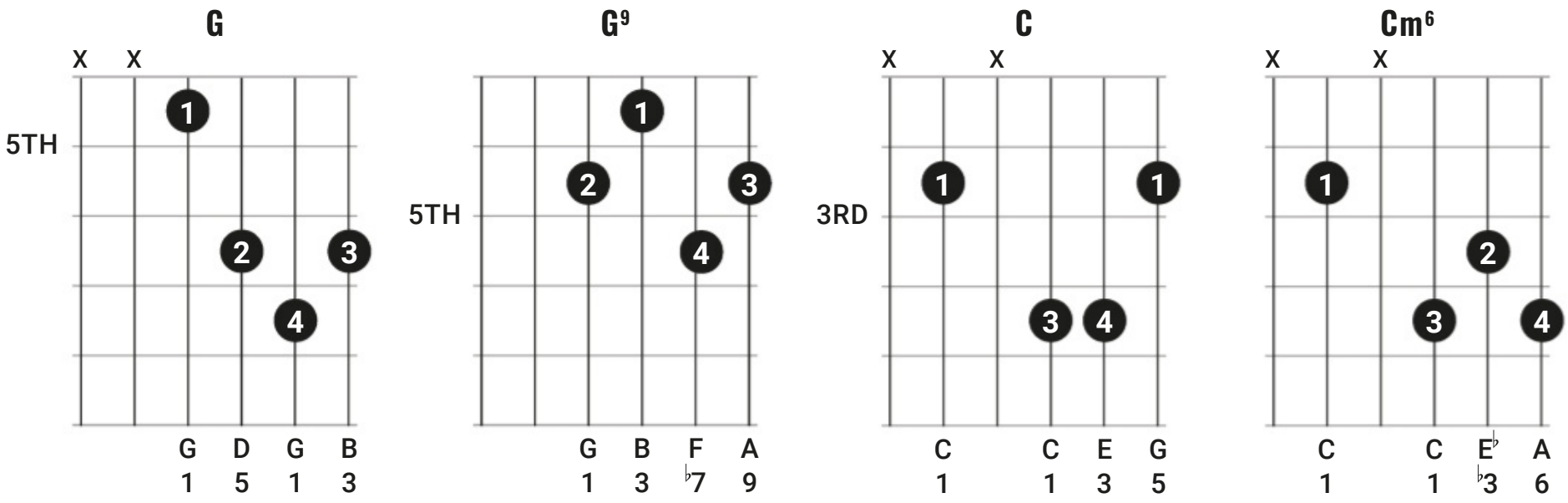
FIGURE 3 VOCAL BACKING

Here, we go through the same four-bar sequence as in Figures 1 and 2, but without any melodic decoration. Just play each chord twice, once per beat. The idea behind this simpler approach is to imagine you are accompanying a vocalist, feeding in expressive harmony but staying out of the way melodically.

Notice how smoothly the G major chord leads to the G9, with the top two notes descending two frets. Similarly, C to C minor sixth has some neat voice leading.

That's not to say that large leaps are unacceptable – check out the jumps from E minor through A9 to D major. Some of these moves will be tricky for your fretting hand, but you can make things easier by holding on to notes which are common between two chords – fingers one and three between C and C minor sixth, for example.

Always try to move your fingers smoothly and efficiently between chord shapes; practise difficult moves back and forth and they will come eventually.



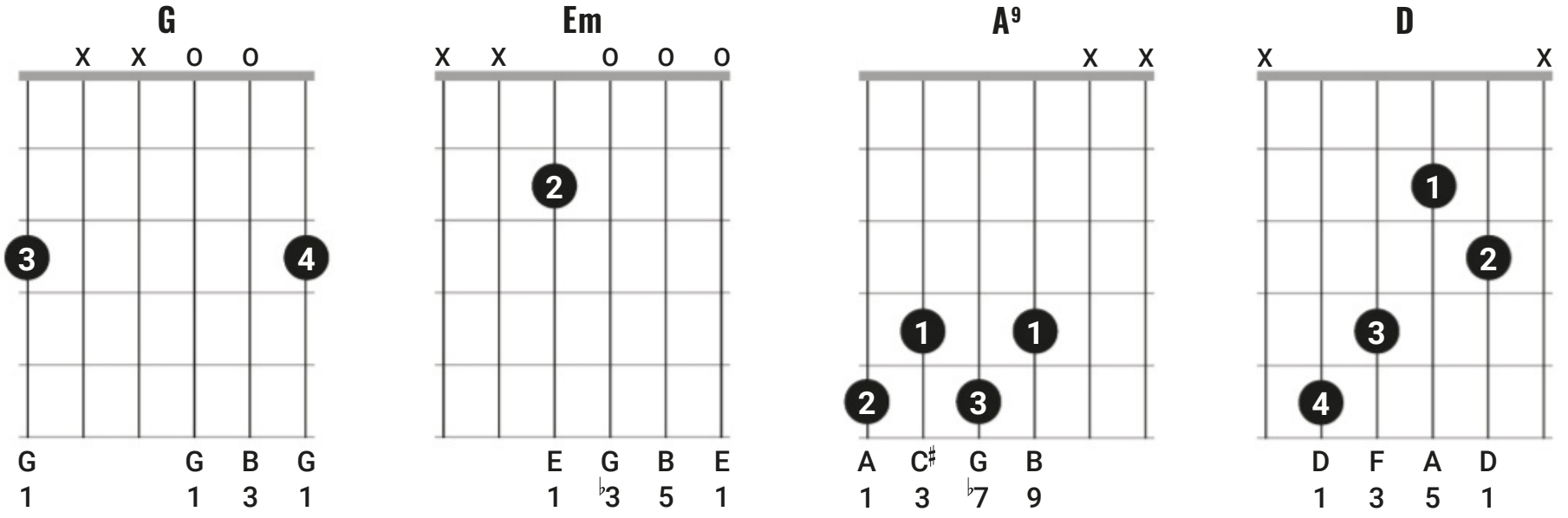


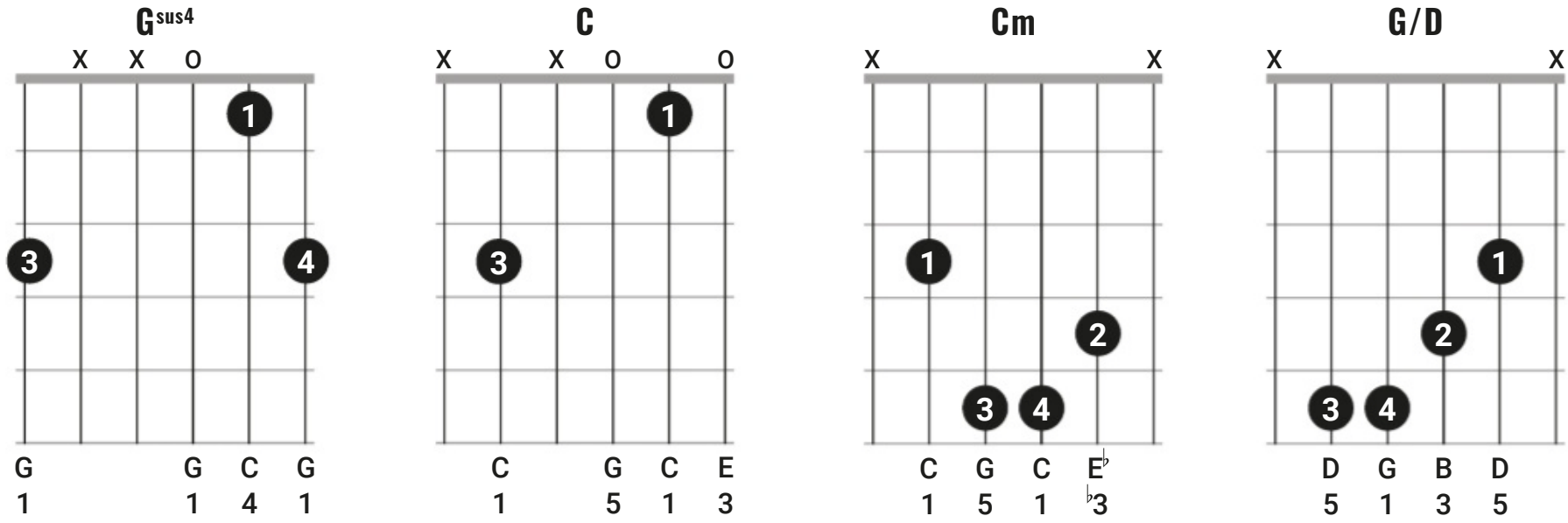
FIGURE 4 NO LIMITS

We can imagine this chord sequence being used as a rising climax for a song, still based on the same four-bar chord sequence, but with some stronger voicings and an interesting twist between the G major and E minor chords.

Begin with the open G major shape from Figure 3, (the fifth shape) and then move on to the Gsus4 chord, which acts as a less flowery, less jazzy, more 'country' substitute for the G13 and G9 chords we have seen in the earlier examples. Continue on to the C and C minor chords, and then play G/D and B/D# for one beat each before arriving on E minor. Notice how the chromatic bassline seems to intensify our arrival on the E minor chord.

To end the sequence, we have a low voicing of A major and an expressive D6 chord, which should lead on to a G major chord of your choosing – we recommend the open-string shape from Figure 3 or the first chord from Figure 2. Alternatively, head back to Figure 1 and repeat the intro.

If you've enjoyed getting to grips with these sequences, try playing all the G major chords one after another, checking out how the notes are voiced on the guitar. Then do the same for the extended G chords (G13, G9 etc), the C major, Cm6 chords and so on. Enjoy the voicings – this approach can give the simplest of progressions some wings!



Rod Fogg is a long-established London-based guitar teacher, professional musician and writer. He is the author of *The Ultimate Guitar Course* (Race Point Publishing, 2014) and contributed to best-seller *The Totally Interactive Guitar Bible* (Jawbone Publishing, 2006). More from rodfogg.com

TALKBOX

ROSS LYNCH

INTERVIEW SAM ROBERTS

The guitarist/actor famed for The Driver Era and for starring as Harvey Kinkle in Netflix's sombre adaptation of *Chilling Adventures Of Sabrina* talks stolen SGs, keto snacks and his guitar that literally plays like butter…

The moment it all started...

"My brothers got into Fall Out Boy and they started playing guitar – being the younger brother I also wanted to participate. I was about 11. I really became serious about the guitar when I was around 15 or 16, after we had already been playing for quite a while. I found a new fascination for the guitar and actually became quite obsessed with it when I discovered certain guitarists like Stevie Ray Vaughan. Actually John Mayer was the person that sort of led me to discover more great guitarists."

I couldn't live without my...

"I have an acoustic Taylor that I call Butter, that is without a doubt my favourite guitar. I pretty much play it every time I'm home, and uh, that's gotta be it. I love that guitar."

The one that got away...

"Oh yeah, [brother and bandmate] Rocky and I were borrowing a Telecaster, and a Gibson with ivory tuning pegs. It was like a 90s Gibson SG and we were loading our van for a gig at a fair, some random gig... we were, like, 13. The guitar wasn't even ours, and someone came and stole it off of our front yard. Yeah, that was a big ordeal. It was shitty 'cause it was a borrowed guitar."

The first thing I play when I pick up a guitar...

"I usually just try to make something up."

My signature model would be...

"Honestly, if I were to have a signature guitar, I'd want it to be a whole new body. Something unique and different that's never really been seen before. I think that'd be fun."

The best advice I've ever been given...

"I actually don't really have a lot of guitar mentors… I just play!"

My guilty pleasure...

"Shania Twain."

I'm in the band...

"Led Zeppelin would be fun."

I wish I was there...

"Freakin' Woodstock, for sure!"

The most important thing on my rider...

"Honestly, we've been touring for a while now, I don't even add anything to the rider. I just let the rest of the band do it. I guess I would have to say keto, um, chocolate cups. They're like these… imagine like Reese's, but they're keto. So good."

If I could just play one thing...

"No, I can pretty much play anything, if I'm being honest!" G

Ross and Rocky Lynch's duo The Driver Era embark on a world tour this April. Their album *X* is out now via BMG

MONOCREATORS.COM/PFX

ELEVATE YOUR PERFORMANCE

DESIGN THE PERFECT SETUP.
MONO pedalboards, risers and accessories combine to keep your setup neat and sleek, for absolute pedal access with no distractions from your music.

Follow us
@MONOCREATORS

mono